



Addressing the Housing Needs of Refugee Families through Transitional Housing and Wrap-Around Supports

INTRODUCTION

The National Housing Strategy (NHS) identifies newcomers and refugees as populations experiencing vulnerability. Refugee families, in particular, face significant challenges to integrating into Canadian society. Organizations that provide settlement services, such as the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba (IRCOM), play a critical role in helping refugee families succeed.

IRCOM's planning project addresses a key gap in understanding how the provision of affordable, transitional housing coupled with wrap-around programming impacts refugee families' resettlement. It enabled IRCOM to increase their capacity in research and evaluation activities to measure outcomes, which will allow them to make data-driven program decisions to enhance the effectiveness of their housing model.

PROJECT OVERVIEW

The goal of this project through the Research and Planning Fund was to build internal capacity for research and evaluation to enhance IRCOM's understanding of the effectiveness of the housing model and impacts on newcomer families.

The project involved literature reviews of settlement/integration indicators and outcomes and a review of the literature on best practices related to data quality and management.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The literature reviews across six themes discuss important findings and elaborate on identified outcomes and indicators. Below are brief summaries of each topic, with one example of an identified outcome/indicator.

Photos taken prior to COVID-19 physical distancing safety measures

Housing

In the literature on the housing outcomes of newcomers to Canada, **affordability** emerged as the main housing issue for many newcomers. This means that they have to dedicate a large proportion of their incomes to housing, leaving them with few resources to cover the costs of other basic needs.

Affordability indicator (core housing need): Households spending 30% or more of their pre-tax household income on shelter costs are considered to be in core housing need if their income is such that they could not afford alternative suitable and adequate housing in their community. Households that spend 50% or more of their pre-tax income on shelter are in severe housing need.

Language proficiency

Proficiency in an official language is one of the most important factors contributing to successful integration, because it enables newcomers to participate in the social, economic, political, and cultural aspects of society. For instance, research findings suggest that immigrant language skills are strongly related to their **labour market** outcomes. Knowledge of official language(s) affects immigrants' earnings and labour market access.

Labour-market-outcomes indicators: Commonly used indicators of the extent of labour market outcomes include weekly, monthly or annual wages and earnings, as well as the type and status of employment.

Financial literacy

Financial literacy education has the potential to increase financial knowledge and help individuals and families make well-informed financial decisions that will contribute to their financial well-being. One of the goals of financial literacy education is to impact **financial behaviour**.

Financial-behaviour-outcomes indicators: These indicators measure the extent to which people are behaving in financially literate ways, such as how they are controlling spending, whether they are paying bills on time, engaging in financial planning, saving for the future and using a budget.

After-school youth programs

After-school programs offer a wide range of activities, including participation in sports and arts activities, community engagement, and assistance with homework, which can have many positive outcomes. Research studies show that involvement in community programs provides youth with opportunities for socialization and access to enriching experiences that promote development of **academic skills**.

Academic-achievement indicators: Academic achievements may be measured by years of schooling completed, degrees or credentials earned, honours or awards received, improved grades, homework completion, and also school retention, such as grade repetition or being behind in a grade relative to one's age.

Childcare and early childhood education

Immigrant children disproportionately face stressors in early childhood, such as low family income, low parental education, and lack of exposure to the English language that may affect their ability to enter school ready to learn. High-quality early childhood education programs have the potential to influence school readiness in immigrant children.

School-readiness indicators include tests that measure pre-reading and pre-math skills.

Community connection

Social connectedness and participation in one's community benefit individuals and a community as a whole. Individuals' feelings and attitudes about their social status in the community, sense of belonging, level of trust in others and institutions, experiences of discrimination, and perceptions of safety, are important for interpreting their social connectedness and community engagement. For instance, **sense of belonging** has been positively associated with one's desire to engage with and contribute to one's community by voting in elections, participating in group activities, or volunteering.

Sense-of-belonging indicators: Proportion of the population who report a somewhat strong or very strong sense of belonging to their community/neighbourhood/country.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE HOUSING INDUSTRY

Findings from IRCOM's literature review highlight the important need for holistic, wrap-around support for new refugee families. This planning project also created many valuable resources for IRCOM and enabled them to increase their internal capacity for research and evaluation. They created tools that can be shared with similar organizations looking to enhance research capacity and quality. Organizations that provide housing and other services could benefit greatly from understanding how to measure success and evaluating the effectiveness of their programs.

IRCOM was successful in receiving funding through the NHS Research and Planning Fund for a follow-up research project, which commenced in March 2020. The goal is to measure factors that contribute to newcomers' successful transition to appropriate and affordable housing and social factors that contribute to the successful integration of refugees into Canadian society. Results from the research project are expected in fall 2021.

FURTHER READING:

[Immigrant & Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba \(2021\) Addressing the Housing Needs of Refugee Families through Transitional Housing and Wrap-Around Supports.](#)

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