

Gender, Immigration and Integration: Exploring Innovative and Best Practices

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Presented by Immigration, Refugees and
Citizenship Canada (IRCC)
in partnership with
Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)



Immigration, Refugees
and Citizenship Canada

Immigration, Réfugiés
et Citoyenneté Canada



CIWA

Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

The Conference on Gender, Immigration and Integration: Exploring Innovative and Best Practices brought together stakeholders working on gender and settlement outcomes from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and the Northwest Territories over two days in Calgary. The conference was funded by Immigration Refugee Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and hosted by Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA).

Introduction

During this two-day conference, attendees and presenters came together to discuss successes and challenges in service provision with a gender perspective, showcased innovations in programming with a gender lens, and helped to identify proven, best, and promising practices to strengthen the sector. The speakers covered topic areas such as: employment, family violence, rural context, support services for women, gender and sexuality, refugee services, mental health, language services and collaboration.

Participants had a variety of learning opportunities, including plenary events, breakout panel presentations, poster presentations, round tables, challenge case workshop, and formal and informal networking opportunities.

An advisory committee for the conference provided both guidance and direction to the conference themes, structure and content. They comprised of staff members from CIWA, IRCC, Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers, Mount Carmel Clinic, Regina Open Door Society, Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association and Southeast Advocates for Employment.

Conference Goals

Drawing on the diverse and rich expertise of the conference attendees, the conference aimed to achieve the following goals:

- Provide a platform for stakeholders to share their programs, research, innovations, and promising practices with others working in the sector.
- Share a variety of regional and urban-rural perspectives on gender, immigration, and integration.
- Create dialogue across the region and foster opportunities for learning, collaboration, and partnerships.
- Deepen knowledge across stakeholders around the diverse impacts of gender on settlement, services, and integration.
- Highlight the differences in adopting a gendered lens for programs and developing gender specific/focused services for immigrants.
- Identify future priorities, gaps, and emergent challenges for working on gender and integration.

Conference Format

The conference was designed to promote dialogue and support communication among attendees to deepen knowledge and strengthen learning. The conference incorporated the following formats:

- **Plenary Presentations:** The plenary panels on each day of the conference included presentations from a range of speakers who set the agenda of the conference. The speakers provided context for the conference, discussed key concepts, and highlighted regional perspectives. After each plenary time was allocated for Q&A and interaction with the audience.
- **Breakout Panel Presentations:** These breakout panels were organized around key thematic areas and included presentations that focused on a range of topics/ issues from different organizations. Details on these sessions can be found in the “Session Summaries” document in the Appendix. After the presentations time was allocated for Q& A followed by small group discussions moderated by table facilitators.
- **Challenge Workshop:** One session of the conference was dedicated to solving practical challenges brought forth by two organizations. The format for this workshop was mainly discussion-based. Each organization presented their case and the key challenge they faced. The audience discussed the cases and offered potential solutions and opportunities for innovation, while highlighting promising practices and experiences from their region.
- **Poster & Material Display:** Posters and program materials detailing programs, projects, or research were displayed in the common area in the conference venue on each afternoon. This provided an opportunity for informal networking.
- **Reflections & Ideas Board:** A board for sharing and collaborating ideas was available in the plenary room on both days. Attendees were encouraged to use the board to share critical inputs and questions they may have.

Conference Themes

All conference presentations broadly addressed gender specific or gender focused services, programs and projects in the context of immigration, settlement and integration. They highlighted best and/or promising practices as well as innovations and identified both strengths and challenges that emerged in the sector. The following represent some of the key themes that were identified for the conference, in consultation with the Advisory Committee. Further details will be provided later in the report.

- **Employment:** Participants highlighted gender specific employment programs and discuss issues related to employment skills and transferability, professional development and training, integration of lower skilled migrants in the work force, retirement and workforce participation.
- **Family Violence:** Conference attendees explored issues related to programming and services such as counselling and individual supports, family programs, parenting support, housing and shelter, and emergency or crisis management.
- **Mental Health:** Conference attendees discussed topic areas such as social isolation, peer support, community networks, access to services, stigma, and family supports.
- **Rural Context:** Presenters explored barriers to accessing services such as public transportation, other related problems such as social isolation and community connections, regional employment, aging, and organizational capacity.
- **Refugee Services:** Presentations explored customized refugees services such as language and employment supports, cross-cultural parenting, access to mental health and general health services, and housing. Specific implications for women refugees and challenges in settlement and integration will also be included.
- **Support Services for Women:** Participants addressed topics such as integrated family supports like child-care, interpretation, translation, and transportation, and employment services.
- **Collaboration:** Presentations explored working together in cross sector partnerships and referrals, integrating organizational support services, funder and government relationships, and shared measurement.
- **Services across age groups:** Presentations explored age specific programming for youth, adults and seniors.
- **Language Services:** Conference attendees explored themes such as wrap-around supports for language learners, low-literacy or early literacy programs, gender specific language programs, community language partnerships, and learning supports (e.g. disabilities supports).
- **Gender and Sexuality:** Presentations included gender and sexuality focused services, addressing intersections and collaborations with other organizations.

Conference Themes

Applying a Gender Lens to Immigration, Settlement & Integration

Presenters

- Stephanie Kirland, IRCC
- Beba Svir, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA), Calgary, AB
- Elza Bruk, Bow Valley College, Calgary, AB
- Nita Jolly and Rhonda McIntosh, IRCC

Brief Overview

The presenters in this panel provided a broad overview about the need for developing gender specific programming and applying a gender lens to all work in the sector. IRCC highlighted the need to focus on immigrant women's development and integration and, emphasized a holistic approach to gender programming. They also stressed the importance of providing programming across both rural and urban contexts to support all immigrant women. Additionally, they highlighted the need for outcomes and evidence driven programming to improve efficacy of services.

The CIWA panelist emphasized the importance of gender equity as a fundamental cornerstone of gender programming. To foster conditions for success for immigrant women there needs to be a context where women have the access and ability to utilize resources and enhance their capacities. The panelist substantiated these claims by providing details on the return on investment in immigrant women's programming and discussed the broad range of services/programs that support immigrant women to achieve their full potential.

The Bow Valley panelist spoke about mainstreaming gender programming and the importance of post secondary institutions in serving the needs of immigrant women. The role of post secondary education is significant for both city building and nation building. The panelist provided several examples of a gender focused lens in the structure and services of Bow Valley as well as detailed research that was being currently undertaken on senior immigrant women retirees in partnership with CIWA.

Exploring Promising Practices, Regional Differences and Working with Refugees - A Gender Focused Approach

Presenters

- Rhonda McIntosh, IRCC
- Kristina Larkin, Lethbridge Family Services (LFS), Lethbridge, AB
- Cydney Melnyk, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS), Calgary, AB

Brief Overview

The panel provided an overarching perspective of gender specific programming in areas such as employment, rural contexts and working with refugees. IRCC discussed the importance of making investments in immigrant women specific services. The panelist highlighted services for employment, LGBTQ concerns and language training specifically. The presentation explored the need to increase access to services across both rural and urban contexts, improve the efficacy of services, support clients even after they leave programs and track outcomes effectively.

The LFS panelist detailed the different types of services and programs provided by their agency in a small city context. The panelist highlighted innovative strategies to address issues such as intimate partner violence, LGBTQ concerns and women's health in a context where resources were limited and challenges were many. The presentation also focused on holistic wrap around services and building partnerships with other stakeholders to support service delivery.

The CCIS panelist provided an overview about their organization's services and programs for immigrant and refugee women. The panelist mainly focused on the work with refugee women sharing innovative research to action projects that helped to strengthen their services. The presentation emphasized the importance of evidence-based programming and involving clients in the design and development of programs.

Employment

Presenters

- Punam Dalal & Farzana Mubashir – *Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)* – Calgary, AB
- Marcela Zafra – *Making Changes Association* – Edmonton, AB
- Maisa'a Haj Ahmad & Gabriela Galli – *Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network* – Winnipeg, MB
- Daylene Sliz & Neritza Tapia – *Regina Immigrant Women's Centre* – Regina, SK

Brief Overview:

From pre-employment support to training and ongoing professional development, employment services are a cornerstone of settlement programming. The presenters provided an overview of a broad range of services that support women in preparing for employment opportunities, finding jobs that match their skills and supporting women in the workplace. Services such as bridging programs, life skills programs, job-skills training, job search support, and language support were all key examples to prepare women to enter the work force. Additional supports such as “closet” programs, child minding, skills enhancement and mentorship opportunities helped women who were already in the workplace.

Mentorship and networking support was key strategy highlighted by many of the presenters. By providing clients a one-to one tailormade strategy, they were more likely to succeed and build strong careers. Securing employment, especially one that matches their skills and experience, led to not only financial stability and independence but also helped women become more self-reliant, self-confident and secure. The presenters also spoke about the important implications of employment on women's social and emotional well-being, ability to make connections in the community and strengthen their family life.

Family Violence & Mental Health

Presenters:

- Rekha Gadhia & Celestina Akinkunmi – *Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)* – Calgary, AB
- Caprice Kehler & Malou Josue – *NorWest Co-op Community Health Centre Inc.* – Winnipeg, MB
- Kelly Mills – *Saskatoon Open Door Society (SODS)* – Saskatoon, SK
- Case Challenge : Lorie English – *West Central Women's Resource Centre (WCWRC)* – Winnipeg, MB

Brief Overview:

One of the critical areas of services for immigrant women is around family violence, trauma, and mental health. The panelists provided an in-depth picture of the nature of these challenges and services available to support women. For many immigrant families, the change in social status, family structure and, economic well-being has a direct impact on their mental health and may often lead to increase in conflict among family members or domestic violence. Moreover, barriers such as social stigma, family reputation, lack of trust in police, and cultural norms prevent reporting of violence or mental health concerns. Immigrant women often are dependent on their families for their visa and or financial support. This further jeopardizes their capacity to leave abusive or violent situations and seek safety. Panelists highlighted the specific mental health needs (such as PTSD) of refugee women who may have faced trauma in their country of origin.

Added to this, the lack of knowledge about social supports prevents immigrant women from seeking timely assistance. When they do seek support often services are not culturally sensitive, affordable or easy to access. Also, service gaps or lack of co-ordination in services means that women are unable to find shelter, get legal advice and seek support.

The participants highlighted developing client-centered programs that worked with women across the spectrum of violence and trauma. Examples of such services included emergency housing or shelter, providing easy to access and culturally appropriate counselling in first language and working with all genders on these concerns. Providing holistic care with a multi-disciplinary approach to services that are co-located was a best practice identified by one panelist. Partnerships were also seen as critical to providing a continuum of services to clients.

Embedding these services in other settlement programming was also seen as a useful strategy since many clients may not want to openly address issues of mental health or violence. Participants spoke about developing culturally safe spaces and materials that reflected the cultural needs of their clients. The goal of these programs was to raise awareness about family violence and help respond to disclosures as well as assist women to live independently (with/without children), navigate immigration laws, gain housing and or employment, address social stigma or fears and cope with isolation.

Rural Context

Presenters

- Laurie Carlson – *Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association (CAIWA)* – Red Deer, AB
- Ramazan Nassery – *YMCA of Northern Alberta* – Fort McMurray, AB

Brief Overview:

The panelists discussed providing programming in small centres, and delivering services to rural and remote communities. While some of the smaller centres may not have as many resources or even gender specific organizations, they were able to innovate and serve the needs of immigrant women in their communities. Besides reduced access to services due to geographical spread of the community and lack of transportation, the panelists also spoke about challenges of working with diverse ethno-cultural groups that had specific needs though their population size was small. Specific issues around the lack of legal aid services was discussed at length as a critical concern. Other challenges included lack of diversity in employment options, housing challenges, lack of formal and informal language supports as well as lack of ethno-cultural resources such as religious centres, food or opportunities to celebrate their culture. Overall, the panelists highlighted that even though small and rural communities were seeing an increase in demand for services, the funding and resource allocation was proportionally unable to keep pace.

Participants shared some innovative practices such as creating an access card for low income families that would serve both immigrant and non-immigrant communities. This supported increased utilization of social, employment, language and recreation services. Panelists highlighted that within smaller communities or rural contexts it became even more critical to work with multiple stakeholders such as the government, businesses and community organizations to leverage on already existing resources or services, build capacity and share ideas.

Refugee Services

Presenters

- Salimah Kassamali – *Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies* – Calgary, AB
- Amna Hamid & Cinthya Luque – *YWCA of Prince Albert* – Prince Albert, SK
- Eva Szasz-Redmond and Celestina Akinkunmi – *Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)* – Calgary, AB
- Case Challenge Workshop: Jill Edgington Kirby – *Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS)* – Calgary, AB

Brief Overview

The panelists discussed the specific programming, research and services developed for refugee women. The discussion highlighted the variety of challenges that refugee women faced in terms of their settlement and integration. These challenges go beyond employment, language, housing and social integration concerns that impact all immigrants. They also include addressing mental health and trauma, physical health, community rebuilding and family re-unification or separation concerns. Panelists pointed out that none of these issues can be tackled in isolation from each other and often required a comprehensive approach. The recent influx of Syrian refugees has brought forward these concerns more strongly, pointing to the need to strengthen the sector's approach to refugee resettlement overall.

The panelists detailed that a client-centered holistic approach that serves refugee women can be considered a best practice. By continually assessing the needs of refugee women, panelists shared, organizations can remain vigilant and sensitive to the dynamic nature of settlement and integration. By involving clients in developing case plans, panelists highlighted, clients can feel empowered and more committed to their case plans. Given that the needs of refugee women may be heightened at arrival, panelists spoke about the need to have first language services easily accessible, they also spoke about linking refugee women to others in their community through outreach and community events as well as creating supports that go beyond the services themselves and assist refugee women in all aspects of their social and community life.

Support Services for Women

Presenters

- Roselyn Advincula – *Aurora Family Therapy Centre* – Winnipeg, MB
- Eva Szasz-Redmond & Celestina Akinkunmi - *Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)* – Calgary, AB
- Cindy Colman & Bukurie Mino – *Centre for Newcomers* – Calgary, AB
- Elauna Boutwell – *Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN)* – Edmonton, AB
- Emily Yan – *Saskatoon Open Door Society (SODS)* – Saskatoon, SK

Brief Overview

Within comprehensive service delivery for immigrant, refugee, and newcomer populations, the provision of support services tailored to women is a key component for success. All five presenters shared details about their programs that provided specific services for women that focused on therapy, family support, language skills, social relationships, life skills programs, employment, wellness, and empowerment. These programs helped women to strengthen their capacities and learn practical skills. The discussion highlighted the multiple challenges that clients faced including isolation, lack of sense of belonging and confidence, poor access to knowledge and information, cultural barriers, child minding concerns, and issues around language, transportation and employment.

They provided examples of client-centered care programs that were tailored to emergent community needs such as the incoming Syrian population. Panelists pointed out, that listening to their clients' needs, creating a safe and welcoming environment, making accurate assessments and referrals, identifying clients' strengths and building partnerships with others in the sector were key strategies for success. Panelists spoke about providing immigrant women with opportunities to share their experience and learn from each other through networking or community events. They shared, that this helped immigrant women to gain confidence and develop strong connections in the community.

Collaboration

Presenters

- Evelyn Agedzi – *Mount Carmel Clinic* – Winnipeg, MB
- Leigh Rosales – *Today Family Violence Help Centre* – Edmonton, AB

Brief Overview

The presentations focused on both internal collaborations within different divisions of the non-profit or external collaborations with other non-profits, businesses, religious organizations, community centres or ethno-cultural communities. Presenters spoke about expanding their services or strengthening their work through these collaborations as often one organization is unable or lacks the expertise in serving all needs for the client. Panelists highlighted some of the key types of collaboration such as referrals, working with community experts, co-ordination of services between systems, participating in cross-sectoral collaborations, co development of programs between immigrant serving agencies and other organizations, co-facilitation of programs, and co-locating services in community sites.

The participants discussed how these collaborations were at time challenging given different work cultures, adapting to differing goals or needs of collaborators and diverse understanding of success. While working with communities the other key challenge was to negotiate with the gatekeepers of the cultural group, these community gatekeepers would prevent or facilitate the participation of the community in any collaborative endeavor.

Services across age groups

Presenters

- Martha Fanjoy & Celestina Akinkunmi – *Bow Valley College & Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)* – Calgary, AB
- Iliana Anaya & Faisal Salama – *Global Gathering Place* – Saskatoon, SK
- Wendy Auger – *Immigrant Services Calgary* – Calgary, AB

Brief Overview

The development of a strong sector means that programming must be available to assist all immigrants- ranging from youth to seniors. The panelists presented on range of programs, services and research that targeted clients based on their age group. The first presentation focused on a research project that explored the needs of senior immigrant women retirees. The project discussed the idea of co-development of programming and highlighted the role clients can play in developing and designing services.

Other presentations highlighted several programs that targeted various age groups on issues such as: prenatal and postnatal health, educational and language support programs for youth, social and community building programs for families, life skills services, mentoring and volunteering programs and therapeutic programs.

Overall, the panelists pointed to the advantages of serving the needs of clients' across the age spectrum as it helps to engage the entire family, build developmentally appropriate services and encourage strong networks among peer groups. The presentations showcased the wide range of services available across different age groups and the potential for customized services to improve settlement outcomes.

Language Services

Presenters

- Theresa Wall – *Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)* – Calgary, AB
- Cathy Dowd & Miriam Turyamwijuka – *Portage Learning and Literacy Centre* – Winnipeg, MB

Brief Overview

The presentations in this panel addressed the key issue of language learning and literacy, highlighting the gender specific components of such training. The panelists pointed out that immigrant women often face additional challenges related to literacy and language acquisition as compared to men. The presentations highlighted that with fewer opportunities to participate in social, educational and community life, immigrant women were less likely to practice and improve their linguistic skills in a public setting. With lower language ability, the presenters shared, immigrant women were also likely to face challenges in terms of employment and career growth.

To support their clients, the presenters pointed to a range of language programming that not only provided education but also supports in terms of transportation, child care, disability services, pre-literacy aid, family literacy programming and workplace focused training and mentorship. This type of support was considered as a best practice for language services for immigrant women. Collaborating with partners around service provision has been a key element of their success.

Gender and Sexuality

Presenters

- Karen Sadler - *Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA)* - Calgary, AB
- Paula Migliardi - *Sexuality Education Resource Centre (SERC)* – Winnipeg, MB

Brief Overview

Gender and sexuality plays a key role in the context of identity development and socialization. To ensure that all members are served with dignity and respect in an environment that is safe and allows them to express themselves is critical. Even though traditionally immigrant serving agencies have not addressed this issue in the context of integration and settlement, there is a growing recognition around the necessity to support clients as they navigate and come to terms with gender and sexuality concerns.

The panelists spoke about the current programs that included working with LGBTQ communities, providing training to immigrant serving staff around cultural sensitivity and intergenerational dialogue to resolve conflicts and strengthen sexuality education to support building healthy communities. Both presenters spoke about the need to create safe spaces that encouraged families and communities to address concerns as they emerge. This becomes particularly challenging for immigrants who may have different values or cultural understanding of gender and sexuality.

Presenters also spoke about providing additional resources such as food or transportation that supports participants and encourages their engagement. They highlighted that this process is at a nascent stage as organizations are learning how to address sexuality and gender in the context of their work. Recognizing that staff working with newcomers were not always comfortable or knowledgeable about sexuality or gender issues, presenters spoke about creating supports and resources to help both staff and clients address these concerns. There is also a focus on addressing structural issues within communities and organizations such as changing the policies, training leadership and building systems that are sensitive to these concerns. Presenters spoke about investing in partnerships that focused on collective impact and leveraging expertise as needed, they highlighted that strong partnerships with sexual health organizations are key for effective service delivery. By investing in evaluation, training and research these strategies can be built on a firm evidence base and strengthen practice on the ground.

Innovation & Best Practice

Presenters:

- Aline Ngoga – *Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada* – Ottawa, ON
- Natasha Beg – *Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada* – Ottawa, ON

Brief Overview

The session included a brief presentation from the Integration and Foreign Credentials Referral Office at Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC). It included an overview of IRCC's Settlement Program priority setting process and included demographic information on newcomer women and their usage of settlement services. The key barriers to service utilization included: low language proficiency, lack of credential recognition, lack of economic independence, housing, transportation, childcare, immigration status and sponsorship as well as gender role expectations. They highlighted the need to develop innovative practices that will serve immigrant women better through a client-centered model. They also discussed the need for better and more comprehensive reporting that can capture all outcomes and impacts of programs. Additionally, they provided case examples of promising practices from across the country.

Lived Experience Panel

Presenters

- Rutuja Deshpande - HIPPY Program, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)
- Melissa Villarreal Martinez - Find Me a Home, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)
- Somayeh Rafiei - Links to Success Program, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)
- Rovella Collado - Cross Cultural Parenting Program, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA)

This panel brought together four immigrant women to share their immigration and settlement journeys. They spoke about different streams of settlement services such as language, cross cultural parenting training, housing and employment supports, they detailed how this facilitated their integration into Canadian society. Each woman spoke about the challenges and barriers to settlement including finding employment that matched their skills and experience, social isolation, child care, transportation and, physical and mental health issues. They also highlighted a variety of strategies that they employed to overcome these challenges, such as finding mentors, attending trainings, networking, participating in bridging programs, utilizing support services and engaging with other peers.

The panel underscored the importance of having lived experience voices as a part of program design and program development. Audience members provided several examples of client-led and client supported initiatives, which not only enhanced the capacities of the clients but also helped to develop programs that were grounded and sensitive to client needs.

Conference Outcomes and Impact

Conference Reach

36 organizations participated in the conference with a total of 100 participants. This included 30 volunteers, event planners, and IRCC representatives. The conference had representation from all invited organization in the Prairies and the Northwest Territories. The organizations were uniquely selected by IRCC to be invited to this conference. The selected organizations included both those that exclusively provide services for women, as well as organizations that serve a broad range of clients including women. Each organization nominated a maximum of two participants to attend the conference on their behalf. Conference attendees brought with them a range of experience and knowledge as staff, managers, supervisors, project leads, and executive directors. This ensured a rich and fruitful discussion at the conference.

Conference Impact

34 (approximately 1/3) conference attendees provided feedback through evaluation forms that were circulated during the conference. Based on the feedback provided there were several areas of impact:

1. **Learning about best practices and innovations:** The participants found several panels useful and learnt from their peers' practices and approaches. The following panels were given special mention:
 - **Lived experience panel** – Conference participants found the stories and experiences of the women as a grounding factor in the conference. These stories reminded the participants about the impact of their work and the challenges faced by clients in their everyday lives. By involving those at the receiving end of these services the conference celebrated the importance of client-centered approaches.
 - **Case Challenge workshop** – Conference participants found the structure of this session useful as it was focused on practically 'solving' a problem/challenge in a short span of time. This format can be used in future conferences to effectively engage participants and support collaborative work and innovative thinking.
 - **Plenary sessions** – Conference participants found the mix of IRCC representatives and service providers invigorating and crucial to set the stage for the conference. They particularly valued the time given for the question and answer part of the session, as it gave them time to engage in dialogue and clarify ideas.
 - **IRCC best practices round table** – Conference participants appreciated the informal discussion oriented approach of the best practices round table. Participants highlighted that they were keen to learn more about best practices nationally and outcome measurement.
 - Other sessions that were mentioned as useful or impactful included:
 - Employment- Participants were interested in strategies around employer engagement and gender focused employment programming.
 - Rural Context- Participants highlighted the importance of learning to adapt strategies to work in both small centres and rural contexts.
 - Collaboration- Participants found the approaches and strategies for collaboration useful.

- Family violence and mental health- The participants found the panel interesting and critical in terms of learning best practices and approaches to working with clients.
 - Services across ages- Participants found the session useful in terms of understanding a range of issues that emerge while working with clients across different age brackets.
2. **Networking:** Based on the evaluation almost all participants found the conference extremely useful to network with others in the region. The small size of the conference allowed for 'good conversation' and sharing experiences both formally within the sessions and, informally across the two days. The attendees shared that it was helpful to meet others from the Prairies and North-west Territory region and share resources as well as ideas.
 3. **Sharing program learning and best practice:** The conference provided an opportunity for participants to share and showcase their own programs, for many, this was the most critical element of the conference. By providing a platform for dialogue and enrichment of learning, conference attendees took back lessons from the region to enhance their own programs and services.
 4. **Explore strategies and pathways to build partnerships across and within sectors.** The conference participants underscored the importance of collaboration both within and across sectors. At the same time, they also pointed to the challenges of developing collaborations, finding funding, creating accurate measures and sharing information. Conference participants further shared, that innovative practices were more likely to emerge through collaboration with others.
 5. **Funding and reporting:** The conference provided a space for participants to network and dialogue with others to explore different funding streams or opportunities. Participants also got a chance to interact with funders (IRCC) to discuss the challenges as well as strategies for reporting outcomes and identifying indicators that adequately capture the breadth of their work.
 6. **Client-centered gender based programming:** Involving clients in program design and development, and working towards a client-centered approach emerged as critical topics at the conference. Conference participants discussed exploring meaningful opportunities to involve clients by providing a platform to share their voice, and tailor programs to meet their needs. There was also discussion on expanding gender-based programming across the region and addressing issues of family/domestic violence, mental health, gender and sexuality, and building social connections.

Overall Feedback

1. Most attendees thought that the conference was well organized and well managed. Given that the conference was organized in a short span of time attendees recognized the significant effort it took to organize the event. However, they would have appreciated more time to prepare and receive information about the conference.
2. Attendees found the sessions to be well moderated and organized. Attendees also appreciated the different formats for learning as well as the amount of time available to network and learn.
3. Attendees would have liked more 'practical activities' to increase participation around joint problem solving and action. Another suggestion was to provide a 'walking tour' of the host city and the organizations.
4. Attendees would have liked greater representation from non-immigrant serving sector collaborators and LINC providers.

Future Conference Thematic Areas

1. **Unpacking best practices and innovation:** While the conference provided an important platform to begin discussion on best practices, innovation, and evidence, the conference attendees articulated the need to **deepen the dialogue** around these issues further. Participants wanted to understand how funders and stakeholders categorized programs as 'best practice' and strategies to 'scale up' such programs. Further guidelines around **'how to implement best practice' and support innovation** within the structure of current funding models was also desired.
2. **Developing stronger links between immigrant serving-sector and other stakeholders:** Conference attendees spoke about the diverse ways they were already working with stakeholders from other sectors. However, attendees highlighted the need to continue building these collaborations and **include the collaborating organizations** in future conferences to **enrich dialogue and learning**.
3. **Gender and sexuality:** The conference brought out clearly the need for further discussion around issues of gender and sexuality. Several conference attendees highlighted the need for a more **thorough discussion about gender and sexuality** within the context of the immigrant sector. Even though these concerns may not be the central pillar of the work of settlement organizations, they are central to identity formation and integration of immigrants. Settlement organizations are in the position of supporting clients facing challenges around these issues but also, helping clients understand the context of gender and sexuality in Canada.
4. **Rural and small city context:** While there was representation from smaller centers and rural contexts, the issues and challenges brought forth by organizations required further exploration and discussion. Attendees spoke about the need to **share strategies to secure funding, engage in collaboration and serve diverse needs with limited resources**.

5. **Gender lens to settlement work:** There were several conference attendees who spoke about the need for further discussion around adopting a **gender lens on settlement**. Attendees highlighted the need to understand gender as a concept and link it to their work on the ground.

Opportunities emerging from the conference:

There are several opportunities that emerged for future work from this conference

1. Developing a **‘white paper’ or a joint statement on the application of a gender lens within the immigrant sector**. This could include the basic principles and developing a common understanding of gender specific services and the application of a gender lens. It would provide immigrant serving agencies a blueprint to work on these issues and help to set a common language and agenda.
2. Have a **semi-annual retreat in the region** to discuss how organizations are moving forward on the gender agenda, especially discussing program design, program outcomes and program impact.
3. **Create specific indicators and impact measures** that help immigrant serving agencies **operationalize a gender sensitive lens** in their programs. Provide training and support to organizations around measuring and evaluating their programs with a gender equity lens.
4. **Create round tables and/or professional learning opportunities** around best practices, innovation, collaboration, measurement, outcomes and impact that are open to both immigrant serving agencies and their collaborators.
5. Provide **stronger support at a programmatic level to develop shared outcomes and track and evaluate programs to identify ‘best practices’ across the region**. Share best practices more systematically across the region and help to ‘unpack’ program elements that can be replicated or adapted for easy adoption.
6. Create **special funding streams to support innovation** across programs, recognize innovative ideas, and provide support to scale those ideas regionally.

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Appendix 1

List of Organizations in Attendance

1. Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (AAISA) – *Calgary, AB*
2. Aurora Family Therapy Centre – *Winnipeg, MB*
3. Banff Settlement Services – *Banff, AB*
4. Bow Valley College – *Calgary AB*
5. Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) – *Calgary, AB*
6. Calgary Immigrant Women's Association (CIWA) – *Calgary, AB*
7. Catholic Social Services – *Edmonton, AB*
8. Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association (CAIWA) – *Red Deer, AB*
9. Centre d'accueil et d'établissement – *Edmonton, AB*
10. Centre for Newcomers – *Calgary, AB*
11. Edmonton Catholic District School Board, LINC Program – *Edmonton, AB*
12. Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMNC) – *Edmonton, AB*
13. Foothills Catholic Immigration Society – *Calgary, AB*
14. Global Gathering Saskatoon – *Saskatoon, SK*
15. Immigrant Services Calgary (ISC) – *Calgary, AB*
16. Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)
17. Lethbridge Family Services – *Lethbridge, AB*
18. Making Changes Employment Association of Alberta – *Calgary, AB*
19. Moose Jaw Multicultural Council Inc. – *Moose Jaw, SK*
20. Mosaic - Newcomer Family Resource Network INC – *Winnipeg, MB*
21. Mount Carmel Clinic – *Winnipeg, MB*
22. Multicultural Association of Wood Buffalo – *Fort McMurray, AB*
23. NorWest Co-op Community Health Centre Inc. (NorWest) – *Winnipeg, MB*
24. NWT Literacy Council – *Yellowknife, NT*
25. Portage Learning and Literacy Centre – *Portage la Prairie, MB*
26. Regina Immigrant Women Centre (RIWC) – *Regina, SK*
27. Regina Open Door Society (RODS) – *Regina, SK*
28. Saamis Immigration Services Association – *Medicine Hat, AB*
29. Saskatoon Open Door Society (SODS) – *Saskatoon, SK*
30. Sexuality Education Resource Centre MB, Inc (SERC) – *Winnipeg, MB*
31. SPEC Association for Children & Families – *Brooks, AB*
32. YMCA of Northern Alberta – *Fort McMurray, AB*
33. Today Family Violence Help Centre – *Edmonton, AB*
34. West Central Women's Resource Centre (WCWRC) – *Winnipeg, MB*
35. YWCA of Calgary – *Calgary, AB*
36. YWCA of Prince Albert – *Prince Albert, SK*

Appendix 2

Program Schedule Day 1

8:00 – 9:00 Registration

9:00 – 10:45 Applying a Gender Lens to Immigration, Settlement & Integration

- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- Bow Valley College

10:45 – 11:00 Morning Break

11:00 – 12:30 Morning Breakout Session Panels

1: Gender & Sexuality (Garden Court)

- Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies
- Sexuality Education Resource Centre

2: Family Violence & Mental Health (Plaza 4 & 5)

- Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- NorWest Co-op Community Health Centre Inc.
- Saskatoon Open Door Society

3: Collaboration (Whitehorn)

- Mount Carmel Clinic
- Today Family Violence Help Centre

12:30 – 1:30 Lunch

1:30 – 3:00 Afternoon Breakout Session Panels

4: Support Services for Women (Plaza 4 & 5)

- Aurora Family Therapy Centre
- Centre for Newcomers
- Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers
- Saskatoon Open Door Society

5: Settlement Services & Refugees (Whitehorn)

- Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies
- Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- YWCA of Prince Albert

6: IRCC Round Table on Best Practices & Innovation (Garden Court)

3:00 – 3:30 Afternoon Break & Poster Presentations

3:30 – 4:00 Closing Session (Plaza 4 & 5)

Program Schedule Day 2

8:00 – 9:00 Registration

9:00 – 10:45 Exploring Promising Practices, Regional Differences and Working with Refugees - A Gender Focused Approach

- Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada
- Lethbridge Family Services
- Calgary Catholic Immigration Society

10:45 – 11:00 Morning Break

11:00 – 12:30 Morning Breakout Session Panels

7: Services Across Age Groups (Plaza 4 & 5)

- Bow Valley College & Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- Global Gathering Place
- Immigrant Services Calgary

8: Language, Learning & Literacy (Garden Court)

- Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- Portage Learning & Literacy Centre

9: Case Challenge Workshop (Whitehorn)

- Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (Mental Health)
- West Central Women's Resource Centre (Family Violence)

12:30 – 1:30 Lunch

1:30 – 3:00 Afternoon Breakout Session Panels

10: Lived Experience Round Table (Garden Court)

- Clients of the Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

11: Employment (Plaza 4 & 5)

- Calgary Immigrant Women's Association
- Making Changes Association
- Mosaic Newcomer Family Resource Network
- Regina Immigrant Women's Centre

12: Rural Context (Whitehorn)

- Central Alberta Immigrant Women's Association
- YMCA of Northern Alberta

3:00 – 3:30 Afternoon Break & Poster Presentations

3:30 – 4:00 Closing Session

- Calgary Immigrant Women's Association

Appendix 3

Conference Background

Gender and Immigration Context

Gender profoundly shapes the way individuals experience processes of immigration, integration, and settlement (Policy Horizons Canada, 2013). Migration and settlement leads to significant changes in the roles of women and men, and may shift or reinforce gender identities. Research shows that this change often leads to different outcomes in terms of settlement and integration across all dimensions. Further to this, age, level of education and race have been shown to impact and shape settlement and integration experiences of immigrant women (Women in Canada, 2012).

Key Statistics

- According to the 2011 National Household Survey, approximately 21.2% of the Canada's female population were immigrant women and girls (3,544,400) or 1 in 5 Canadian women are immigrants.
- In 2016, 52.3% of the total immigrant population was female and the average age of recently arrived female immigrants was 32 years (Statistics Canada, 2016).
- Majority of female immigrants are settling within metropolitan areas across Canada. 91.1% of female immigrants lived in one of the 33 census metropolitan areas in 2011, with Calgary being one of the top four major settlement cities (Statistics Canada, 2016). The top four countries of origin included China, Philippines, India and Pakistan (Statistics Canada, 2015).
- In 2011, 60.6% of immigrant females belonged to a visible minority group. In comparison, 19.3% of Canada's total female population belonged to a visible minority group (Statistics Canada, 2015).
- According to Women in Canada (2015) immigrant women were more likely than their Canadian-born counterparts to hold a university degree. Despite this, unemployment was higher among immigrant women compared with Canadian-born women. Furthermore, university-educated immigrant women were more likely than Canadian-born women to report that they were working in a position that required less education.
- A majority of female immigrants either enter under economic class as spouse or dependent of a principal applicant or under the family class (Women in Canada, 2015). In 2013, 54.1% of female permanent residents were admitted under the economic class (19.7% as principal applicants and 34.4% as the spouse or dependent of a principal applicant) (Women in Canada, 2015). 34.3% were admitted under the family class, and 8.9% were admitted as refugees. A further 2.7% were special cases that did not qualify under any of the three broad admission categories, and who were admitted for humanitarian or compassionate reasons, or for reasons related to public policy (Women in Canada, 2015).
- However, female principal applicant admissions under the economic class has grown in proportion. In 2004, females comprised 30.4% of applicants admitted under this class, with this number growing to 40.9% in 2013 (Women in Canada, 2015).

Gender: Definitions and Concepts

According to the WHO, gender refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed.

While most people are born either male or female, they are taught norms and behaviours in a gendered manner – including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places. When individuals or groups do not “fit” established gender norms they often face stigma, discriminatory practices or social exclusion, all of which adversely may affect settlement and integration. It is important to be sensitive to different identities that do not necessarily fit into binary male or female sex categories.

Gender equality

Refers to equal chances or opportunities for groups of women and men to access and control social, economic, and political resources, including protection under the law (such as health services, education and voting rights). It is also known as equality of opportunity or formal equality. Gender equality is often used interchangeably with gender equity, but the two refer to different, complementary strategies that are needed to reduce gender-based health inequities.

Gender equity

More than formal equality of opportunity, gender equity refers to the different needs, preferences and interests of women and men. This may mean that different treatment is needed to ensure equality of opportunity. This is often referred to as substantive equality (or equality of results) and requires considering the realities of women’s and men’s lives. Gender equity is often used interchangeably with gender equality, but the two refer to different, complementary strategies that are needed to reduce gender-based health inequities

Gender mainstreaming

The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

