

Re-imagining Mental Health Care for Newcomer Children and Families

1.3M
new immigrants settling in Canada from 2016 to 2021

Canada's population is becoming increasingly diverse. Newcomer children and families, particularly those who arrive as refugees, experience pre-and post-migration stressors that increase the risk of poor mental health. Yet studies show persistent inequities in newcomers' access to mental health support.

In 2022, we conducted qualitative research with **33 leadership and frontline staff** across settlement, health, education, and social service sectors in Hamilton, Ontario to understand **barriers and opportunities for improving mental health support for newcomer children and families in Canada.**



Intersecting Barriers to Care

1 Structural

- Inadequate mental health services and funding
- Difficult to navigate systems
- Cultural tensions in understandings of and responses to mental health
- Lack of prevention and early identification and support

2 Provider

- Lack of diversity and representation
- Insufficient knowledge and skills to address newcomers' mental health needs
- Gaps in cultural and language competencies
- Staff shortages and burnout

3 Individual and Family

- Limited mental health literacy and knowledge of available supports
- Need to prioritize settlement needs over mental health concerns
- Stigma and fear of negative repercussions
- Tendency to seek help when child or family is already in crisis

Re-imagining Care

Recommendations for Improving Mental Health Support for Newcomer Children and Families



1 Newcomer Engagement

Amplify and listen to newcomer voices at all stages of policy and program design and implementation



2 Newcomer and Family-Centred Care

Adopt family and community-based approaches centred around the needs and priorities of newcomer children and families



3 Cultural Responsiveness

Understand how culture and migration experiences shape mental health and work with newcomer families to develop culturally responsive interventions



4 Mental Health Promotion and Prevention

Invest in scaled up mental health promotion and prevention activities across all sectors that support newcomer children and families



5 Workforce Diversity and Development

Hire and support a more racially and culturally diverse workforce that better reflects newcomer communities



6 Collaborative and Integrated Care

Develop holistic and cross-sectoral models of care that embed mental health support in settlement, health, education, and other services for newcomers



7 Knowledge Generation and Uptake

Conduct culturally informed, collaborative, and translational research to inform program design, implementation, and outcomes for newcomer mental health and well-being

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