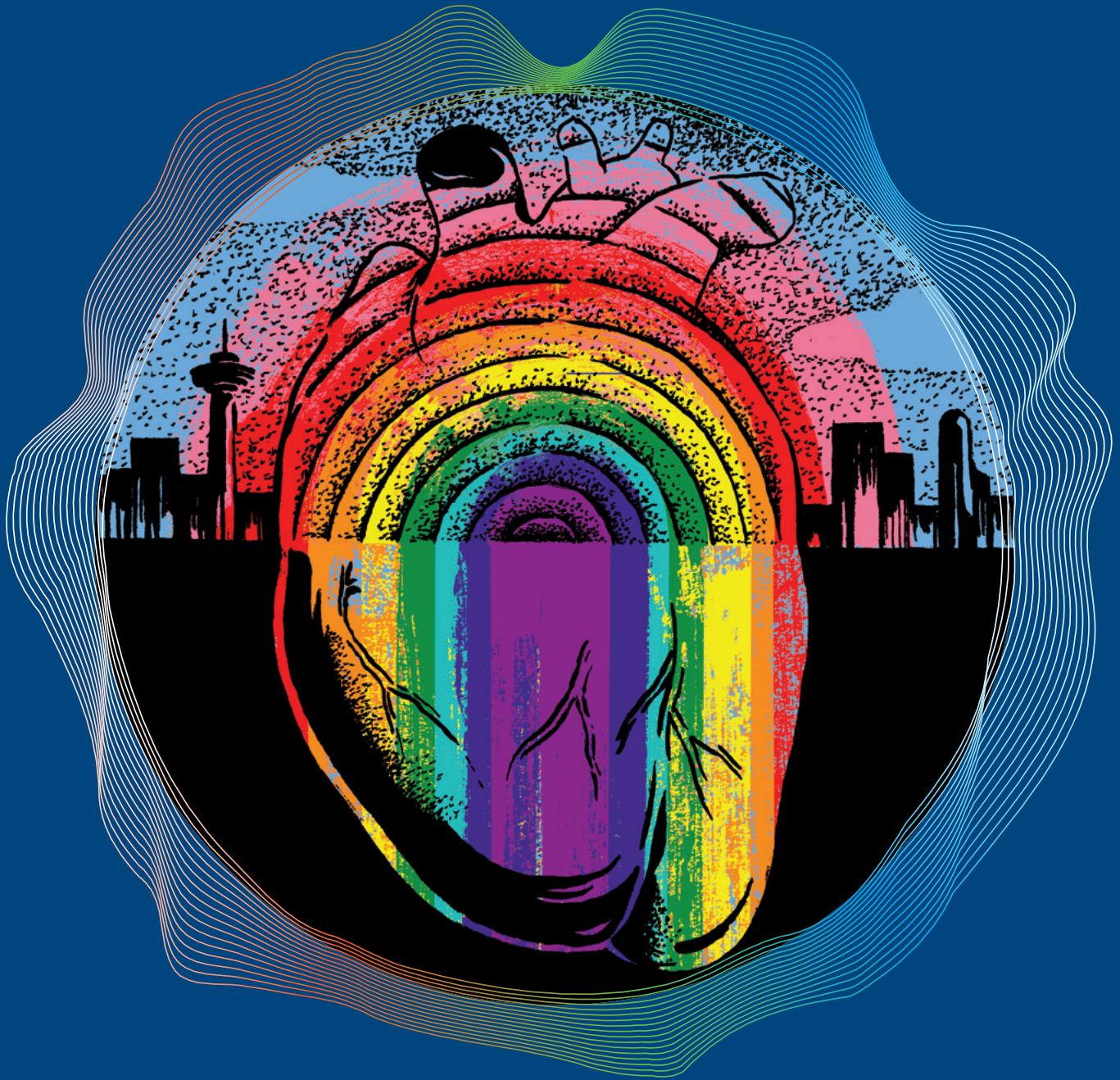




LEVEL
YOUTH POLICY PROGRAM



POLICY BRIEF

Building Integrated Settlement Support Services for
LGBTQ+ Immigrants and Refugees in British Columbia

RASHEED AHMED

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program takes place on the traditional and unceded territories of the xʷməθkʷəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) & səílwətaʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Coast Salish peoples.

GRAPHIC DESIGN

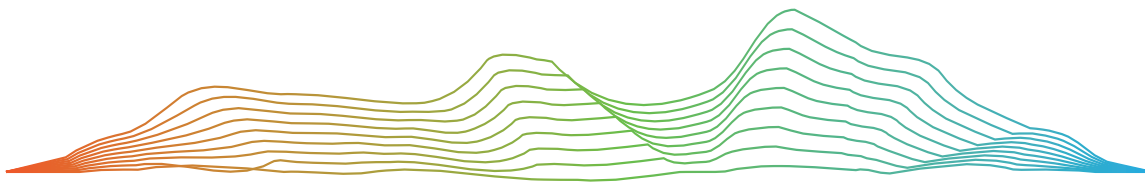
And Also Too

COVER ILLUSTRATION

Yaimel Lopez

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About the LEVEL Initiative

LEVEL is a youth engagement initiative of Vancouver Foundation that aims to address racial inequity. We do this by investing in the leadership capacity of Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, and refugee youth to create more opportunities throughout the non-profit and charitable sector.

Despite being the fastest-growing youth populations in British Columbia, Indigenous, immigrant, and refugee youth don't have the same opportunities as other young people. Race continues to be a factor that hinders their ability to have a say in decisions that impact their lives.

LEVEL empowers these youth by building their capacity to challenge and change those systems that hinder their ability to build a more just world.

LEVEL consists of three pillars of work to advance racial equity

1. LEVEL Youth Policy Program
2. LEVEL Youth Organizing
3. LEVEL Youth Granting

About the LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP)

The LEVEL Youth Policy Program (LEVEL YPP) brings together young people between the ages of 19 and 29 from across British Columbia who identify as being Indigenous or racialized immigrants or refugees. Indigenous and racialized Newcomer youth are dispropor-

tionately impacted by certain public policies but are rarely included in the development and implementation of public policy process. The LEVEL YPP aims to provide these youth with equitable training and leadership opportunities to better navigate the public policy landscape, and to develop new tools and skills to influence, shape, and advocate for policy changes that are relevant in their own communities. Having young people directly involved in shaping policies that impact their lives is essential to creating systemic, meaningful change. The LEVEL YPP's training is grounded from and within Indigenous peoples' worldviews, which the program acknowledges, could vary from person-to-person or nation-to-nation. Indigenous worldviews place a large emphasis on connections to the land. This perspective views the land as sacred; where everything and everyone is related and connected; where the quality of the relationships formed are key in life; where what matters is the success and well-being of the community, and where there can be many truths as they are based on individual lived experiences.¹ As such, an important premise of this training is to centre and place a particular focus on the fact that the work that has gone into developing this training, as well as the training itself, has taken and will take place on unceded (never given away/stolen) territories of the hən̓q̓'əmin 'əḿ-speaking Musqueam peoples, of the Halkomelem-speaking Tsleil-Waututh peoples, and of the sníchimspeaking Skwx_wú7mesh (Squamish) peoples.

1. <https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/indigenous-peoples-worldviews-vs-western-worldviews>

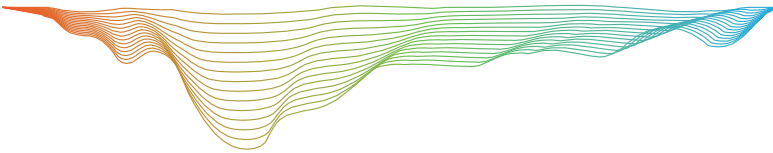


Biography

RASHEED AHMED



Rasheed is a Queer, Immigrant of Colour residing in the Lower Mainland over the past decade. He has a keen interest in issues of social justice, especially as they relate to migration, LGBTQ+ causes, racial discrimination, and food security. Over the past few years he has worked on various projects with local and international non-profits in Bangladesh, Canada, India, and Uganda. Rasheed is interested in the intersections of public policy, community organizing, and social change.



Executive Summary

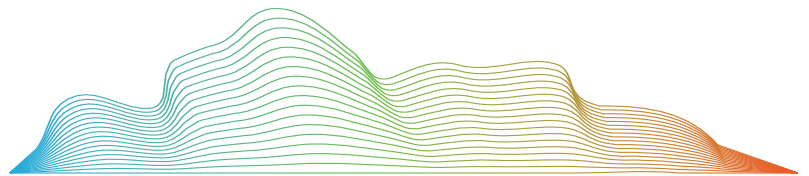
In British Columbia, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ (LGBTQ+) immigrants and refugees encounter barriers to safely access settlement and health services because of their particular and intersecting social positioning in regards to race, culture, same-sex sexuality, and/or gender identity.

This inability to receive necessary services increases the social and health vulnerability of LGBTQ+ Newcomers, which can further impact economic outcomes and affect these Newcomers' overall well-being. In order to better meet the health and settlement needs of LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees, this report outlines recommendations for Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC), Federal and Provincial health agencies and programs, as well as settlement and social-services agencies to implement.

The primary recommendation is for the creation of a central agency for LGBTQ+ Newcomers in British Columbia, which would efficiently address the need for integrated and culturally appropriate services. This would ensure that multiple necessary provisions are delivered in a welcoming environment and would allow for uniform and continual delivery of these services in communities across BC. Importantly, this hub model will also provide

a gathering space for LGBTQ+ Newcomers to form social connections and build community with others, addressing the sense of isolation and loneliness experienced by these groups.

Recognizing the pressing need for settlement, health, and LGBTQ+ agencies to take action, the secondary recommendations suggest changes to organizational approaches towards LGBTQ+ Newcomers that can be implemented in the short- and medium-terms. The recommendations discuss strategies and actions that would minimize the danger and risks of discrimination, stigmatization, and threat to personal safety for LGBTQ+ Newcomers accessing these organizations.



The primary recommendation is for the creation of a central agency for LGBTQ+ Newcomers in British Columbia, which would efficiently address the need for integrated and culturally appropriate services.



Problem Definition and Background

Immigrating to (whether by choice or being forced) and settling in a foreign country is a complex process.

Newcomers to Canada face considerable cultural, social, and practical barriers in adjusting to the ecosystem of this White-settler society and are often subjected to assimilation policies that reinforce social and economic hierarchies and other systems of oppression such as racism (Fournier *et al.*, 2018).

LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees form an often invisibilized subset of the larger Newcomer community in Canada (Fournier *et al.*, 2018; Giwa and Chaze, 2018). These groups face additional challenges in the settlement and integration process compared to their heterosexual and cis-gender peers because of their sexual orientation and/or gender nonconformity. Diasporas and networks of ethno-cultural communities already established in Canada are an important source of social, mental, and economic support for many new immigrants and refugees; however, LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees are likely to face challenges in being accepted and included in these communities (Fournier *et al.*, 2018; Kahn *et al.*, 2017; O'Neill and Kia, 2012; O'Neill and Sproule, 2011; Yee *et al.*, 2014, Giwa and Greensmith, 2012).

Further, LGBTQ+ Newcomers face challenges creating connections with mainstream LGBTQ+ communities because of the prevalence of xenophobia, racism, and discrimination in these communities (Fournier *et al.*, 2018;

O'Neill and Kia, 2012; O'Neill and Sproule, 2011; Giwa and Greensmith, 2012). Other important barriers include these Newcomers not aligning with mainstream (White) conceptualization and notions of identifying as LGBTQ+ (O'Neill and Kia, 2012, Giwa and Greensmith, 2012), and the fear of stigmatization from the Newcomers' ethno-cultural communities for associating with LGBTQ+ communities.

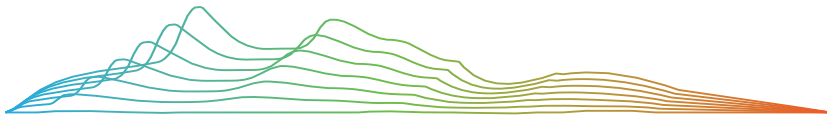
Concerns regarding safety and discrimination remain on the forefront for LGBTQ+ Newcomers (O'Neill and Kia, 2012; Giwa and Greensmith, 2012) and they highly influence decision-making by these individuals when accessing necessary services and generally engaging in society.

These challenges can hinder them from seeking support and forging meaningful social connections within these communities and associated institutions, and can ultimately affect well-being and belonging in all facets of life.

Multiple Canadian research studies have reported on the loneliness and feelings of isolation experienced by LGBTQ+ Newcomers as a result of not "fitting in" or fully identifying



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with their ethno-cultural and/or LGBTQ+ communities (O'Neill and Kia, 2012; O'Neill and Sproule, 2011; Logie *et al.*, 2016; Yee *et al.*, 2014, Giwa and Greensmith, 2012). This stems from LGBTQ Newcomers being unable to reveal multiple dimensions of their identity and compartmentalizing aspects of it based on their social setting; therefore repressing important qualities of themselves, *e.g.*, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. This is exacerbated by the existing challenges of being a Newcomer without familiar support networks.

In Canada, and particularly in BC, there exist an array of settlement and health agencies, as well as other non-governmental organizations, that provide services to immigrants and refugees to support their transition into their new localities. Settlement service agencies generally tend to provide support to Newcomers for up to three-to-five years, or more, for needs including: housing, employment, education, language classes and training, healthcare, navigating Canadian bureaucratic processes, building social connections, *etc.* Settlement agencies play a key role in referring Newcomers to other organizations that can assist them on a needs-basis such as to health-care bodies. In 2018, 510,000 Permanent Residents and protected persons accessed at least one settlement service in Canada (IRCC, 2020).

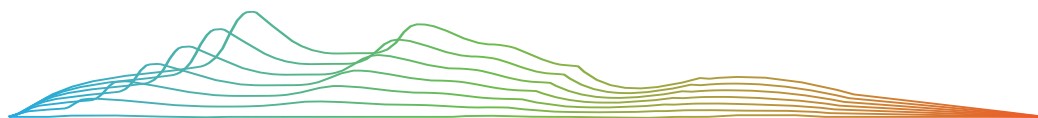
In BC (and arguably much of Canada), there is a lack of appropriate services and a disconnect in resources provided to LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees that take into account the intersectionality of their identities and their complex realities. Settlement service agencies do not adequately address particular concerns and needs of LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees as they may relate to multiple identity-based factors, such as being a Newcomer to Canada and a person who identifies as LGBTQ+ (Suehn, 2015; O'Neill and Kia, 2012; O'Neill and Sproule, 2011). Similarly, most LGBTQ+ service organizations are not able to fully articulate the needs of these LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees, as they are not equipped in providing advice or services that would assist Newcomers navigate systems and spaces in Canada. LGBTQ+ organizations that are not providing services in languages apart from English may also constitute another impediment for Newcomers to avail their services. Additionally, Newcomers may perceive the need to self-label or disclose themselves as LGBTQ+ as condition of access to services provided by LGBTQ+ organizations—which may prevent them from seeking the support they require. Moreover, the inadequacy of cultural competency training in healthcare agencies also results in creating unsafe environments and following insensitive practices, which may deter LGBTQ+ Newcomers from seeking support.



Settlement and health services may not exude a welcoming environment, nor encourage inquiries about services/ supports for LGBTQ+ Newcomers, if they do not visibly display cues that indicate that they are a safe space for LGBTQ+ folks (Giwa and Chaze, 2018; O'Neill and Kia, 2012). This is relative to both the physical site of the organization, where programming takes place, as well as their online presence—particularly their website and social-media channels. Staff attitudes and perception of LGBTQ+ people in these organizations may also prevent Newcomers needing these services from drawing attention to themselves due to concerns of safety and stigmatization (Fournier *et al.*, 2018; O'Neill and Kia, 2012; Suehn, 2015). To compound this, limited awareness about and difficulty locating current applicable settlement, health, and

LGBTQ+ services have also been noted among LGBTQ+ Newcomers (Yee *et al.*, 2014; O'Neill and Kia, 2012).

The lack of recognition and accommodation of multiple identity-based factors, along with other barriers in accessing necessary services, increases the social and health vulnerability among LGBTQ+ Newcomer populations (Fournier *et al.*, 2018; O'Neill and Kia, 2012; O'Neill and Sproule, 2011; Logie *et al.*, 2016; Yee *et al.*, 2014, Giwa and Greensmith, 2012) in BC, and can adversely impact their economic mobility, as well (O'Neill and Kia, 2012; Ramaj, 2018). This hinders LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees' overall well-being, stagnates their settlement trajectories, and prevents these Newcomers from becoming active members of their localities.



The lack of recognition and accommodation of multiple identity-based factors, along with other barriers in accessing necessary services, increases the social and health vulnerability among LGBTQ+ Newcomer populations and can adversely impact their economic mobility.

Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations aim to address several needs of LGBTQ+ Newcomers in BC.

These recommendations cover service aspects that may be beneficial to LGBTQ+ refugees, however, there are additional provisions that will be of particular need to LGBTQ+ refugees that are not covered here. Discussion of these needs and relevant service-delivery necessitates further conversation with LGBTQ+ refugees in BC and the agencies that serve them (e.g. Rainbow Refugees). It is understood that the following recommendations need to be reviewed by service users, settlement service providers, government agencies, partners, and other relevant stakeholders prior to implementation.

It is important to state that all of these policy recommendations have already been suggested as part of previous research studies² done amongst LGBTQ+ Newcomers as well as service providers in settlement agencies and LGBTQ+ organizations in Canada. Alarming, some of these studies (particularly in the context of LGBTQ+ Newcomers in BC) date back nearly 10 years, substantiating an overdue and urgent need for policy intervention. Further, in the current context of a global pandemic disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations around the world, it is crucial that healthcare needs of marginalized newcomers in BC are met in a timely manner.

These recommendations aim to minimize the danger and risks of discrimination, stigmatization, and personal safety for LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees in accessing appropriate settlement and health services. It is recommended that services be provided to this group based on their subjective needs, and not based on the assumptions of government, settlement, and LGBTQ+ organizations.

PRINCIPAL RECOMMENDATION

The principal policy recommendation is for IRCC to work with service users and providers to design a central agency for LGBTQ+ Newcomers in BC.³ This can efficiently address the need for integrated culturally appropriate services and for a central meeting/gathering space for LGBTQ+ immigrants to build community with each other.

Creation of a central agency will ensure that there is a hub where services needed by LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees including settlement, health, and other social services are offered under one roof. This will ensure a safe space for these Newcomers, minimize the need for them to be referred to other service providers, and to be added to long and slow-moving waitlists to receive necessary assistance. An important service provided here would be free or pay-what-you-can individual counselling support.

2. Please see Kahn et al., 2017; O'Neill and Kia, 2012; O'Neill and Sproule, 2011; Yee et al., 2014, Giwa and Greensmith, 2012; Giwa and Chaze, 2018; Logie et al., 2016; Suehn, 2015.

3. Currently in the province, the BC Refugee Hub is a comprehensive online resource that provides information to individuals and service providers to support refugees residing in BC. The Trans Newcomer Hub is another online resource providing specific information that would be of interest to Trans Newcomers. However, both these resources are for information and referral purposes only and do not provide specific programming.



The need for a gathering space is important to catalyse, encourage, and sustain community growth among these populations.

Further, the need for a gathering space is important to catalyse, encourage, and sustain community growth among these populations. This will create a greater sense of belonging and social cohesion among LGBTQ+ Newcomers and help ground them onto their new surroundings.

Key funding to create and run this central agency should be provided by IRCC and the Province of BC. Funding for this hub should continue past an initial or pilot stage in order to guarantee consistency of services provided to LGBTQ+ Newcomers and maintain easy accessibility to it. There will be an ongoing need for this service, as the number of immigrants and refugees to Canada will continue at current and increased levels in future years. Canada is aiming to welcome 341,000 Newcomers in 2020, 351,000 newcomers in 2021 and 361,000 Newcomers in 2022 (IRCC, 2020). According to the evaluation of IRCC's Settlement Program, BC was the intended province of destination for 15% of Newcomers (IRCC, 2017). Further, the success and effectiveness of this model in meeting its objectives can be accurately measured only if the provision has long-term dependable funding backing it.

It is recognised that a central agency for LGBTQ+ Newcomers in BC will take time to establish. This can be factored as a long-term objective (taking approximately five years) allowing IRCC, Federal, and Provincial health agencies and programs, settlement, and social-services agencies to work thoughtfully and collaboratively on the project. Emphasis should be placed on consulting with LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees throughout the development and implementation phases of the project.

SECONDARY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recognising the urgent need to modify existing service models, and to introduce additional service provisions to create a safe and welcoming environment for LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees, the secondary policy recommendations inform short- (approximately six months) and medium- (approximately two years) term objectives for government, health, and social service agencies. Implementing these short- and medium-term objectives will also lay some of the groundwork for the long-term objective of creating a central agency.

Short-Term Objectives

Settlement Service and Healthcare Agencies:

- Reflect on their organizational culture and identify harmful attitudes and practises toward LGBTQ+ folks;

- Train all current and future staff and board members in the challenges faced by this subset of Newcomers in an effort to create a safer service experience;
- Collaborate with LGBTQ+ organizations. Exchanging skills and competency-based training to better support LGBTQ+ Newcomers, and for service providers to set up a network to provide routine referrals and discuss promising practises;
- Indicate on their communication platforms and materials (website, social media, pamphlets) that they are an LGBTQ+-welcoming space, that they provide relevant services to and/or they can refer clients to other service providers that can best serve LGBTQ+ Newcomers' needs;
- Universalize access to applicable settlement/health services. This would include explicitly stating and making available information and services for sexual and gender minorities to all Newcomers served by the organization.

Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada:

- Provide sector-wide funding and incentives for staff training, updating communication materials, and other necessary short-term changes implemented by settlement organizations to become LGBTQ+-inclusive spaces.
- Revise and update information pamphlets, learning materials (e.g. Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada ((LINC)) workbooks), and other literature provided to Newcomers to explicitly portray and refer to Queer, Trans and Two-Spirit peoples. Create additional literature providing substantive information on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity in Canada, which can be made available to all Newcomers.

Medium-Term Objectives

Settlement service and healthcare agencies:

- Create programming specific to LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees that recognizes their settlement experiences and needs as a function of multiple identity-based factors. Providing one-on-one counselling support should be prioritized;
- To run these particular programs, hire staff who are immigrant/refugees themselves, who identify as LGBTQ+, and who can speak in languages other than English;
- Improve strategies for outreach and engagement of LGBTQ+ Newcomers, especially youth. Partner with high schools, LGBTQ+ organizations, and neighbourhood houses/ place-based community organizations to inform about and provide services to a larger number of LGBTQ+ Newcomers;
- Pursue partnerships with other organizations serving these populations in an effort to combine limited resources, and provide supports needed, e.g. supportive counselling, drop-in groups, workshops on accessing government services, etc.



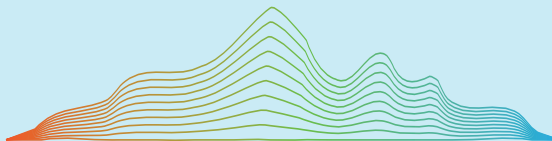
Immigration, Refugees, Citizenship Canada:

- Provide core funding for settlement agencies to run LGBTQ+ Newcomer programs. This is important to ensure consistency and longevity of these programs;
- Provide annual funding to expand the Positive Spaces Initiative (created by the Ontario Council of Agencies Service Immigrants ((OCASI))) to BC, or to create a similar initiative particularly for the province. Identify key province-wide partners, e.g. Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies in BC (AMSSA), to lead the project;
- Amend promising-practices literature for settlement services. The revisions can reflect the need for all agencies involved in Newcomer settlement services to incorporate provisions of general gender and sexuality-related information and resources within the scope of their facilities;
- Actively encourage and financially support LGBTQ+ organizations' participation in Local Immigration Partnership (LIP) projects.

KEY IMPLICATIONS FROM IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ABOVE POLICIES WOULD BE:

- Increased visibility, understanding, and resolution of LGBTQ+ immigrant and refugee individuals and their settlement and health needs;
- Creation of safe and welcoming spaces in settlement and health agencies will encourage LGBTQ+ and other Newcomers to bring forth their particular concerns and receive appropriate support;
- Promotion of varied Newcomer identities coming to Canada that validates the need to train settlement and health workers who understand the complexities of LGBTQ+ Newcomer situations.

Conclusion



In BC, LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees encounter barriers to safely access settlement and health services because of their intersecting social positioning in regards to race, culture, same-sex sexuality, and/or gender identity.

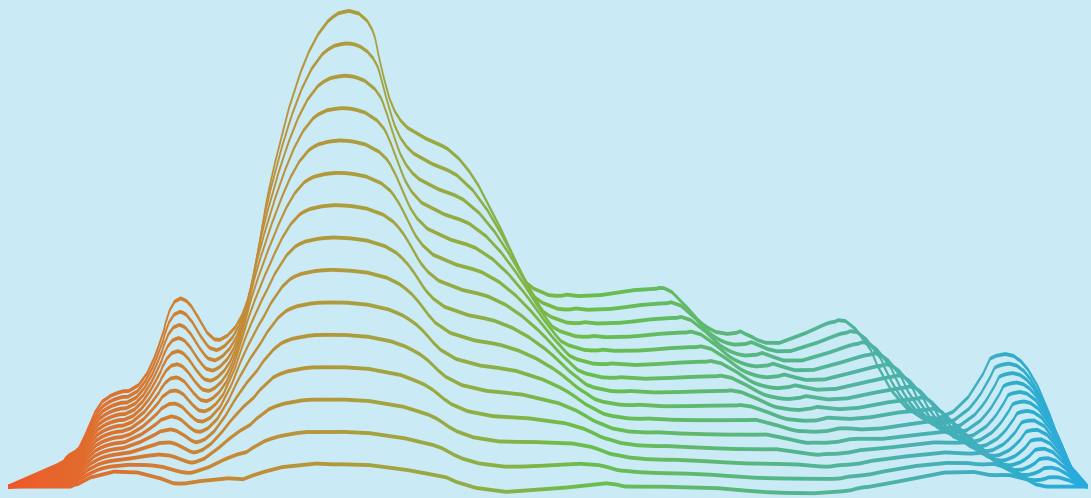
The inability to receive necessary services increases the social and health vulnerability of LGBTQ+ Newcomers, which can further impact economic outcomes and affect these Newcomers' overall well-being.

This report outlines the need to provide integrated, culturally appropriate support service to LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees in BC that takes into account the intersectionality of their identities. This involves implementing sector-wide changes that would minimize the danger and risk of discrimination, stigmatization, and threat to personal safety for LGBTQ+ Newcomers. The principal recommendation is for the creation of a central agency for LGBTQ+ Newcomers in BC, which would provide a comprehensive range of settlement, health, and other social services. This would allow for uniform and continual delivery of these services in communities across the province. Importantly, the hub model will also provide a gathering space for LGBTQ+ Newcomers to form social connections and build community with others, addressing the sense of isolation and loneliness experienced by these groups.



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In BC, LGBTQ+ immigrants and refugees encounter barriers to safely access settlement and health services because of their intersecting social positioning in regards to race, culture, same-sex sexuality, and/or gender identity.

Vancouver Foundation is Community Inspired. We are a community foundation that connects the generosity of donors with the energy, ideas, and time of people in the community. Together, we've been making meaningful and lasting impacts in neighborhoods and communities since 1943. We work with individuals, corporations, and charitable agencies to create permanent endowment funds and then use the income to support thousands of charities. We recognize that communities are complex and that collaboration between multiple stakeholders is needed to help everyone thrive and evolve. Vancouver Foundation brings together donors, non-profits and charities, government, media and academic institutions, local leaders, and passionate individuals to build meaningful and lasting change in the province of British Columbia. We see young people, their voices and experiences as part of that vision to building meaningful change.

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