Urgent and emerging Newcomer Needs survey during the COVID-19 Emergency
Toronto, Ontario - April 2020

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This needs assessment provides a snapshot in time of urgent newcomer needs in Toronto during the COVID-19 pandemic. The information was collected with a survey that ran from April 15 to April 22. **Eighty five surveys were completed by representatives of fifty one organizations located throughout the GTA.** Survey respondents were representatives of community service organizations (settlement, health, mental health, employment etc…) and school boards. They were asked to note specific emergent newcomer needs in the categories listed below. The answers are summarized in this document.

This information is a snapshot in time and we recognize that things are changing quickly. Community organizations are working hard to adapt to new realities and needs during this pandemic, and we hope that this document provides information to help us meet the most urgent needs of newcomers in this time.

If you have any questions about this needs assessment, about services available in your area, please contact the Local Immigration Partnership in your area:

Toronto **West** Local Immigration Partnership	Toronto **North** Local Immigration Partnership	Toronto **East** Local Immigration Partnership (Scarborough)	Toronto **South** Local Immigration Partnership
Contact: Yasmeen Tian Tel: (416) 253-2709 Email: y.tian@jobstart.org www.torontowestlip.ca	Contact: Kaitlin Murray Tel: (416) 649-1630 Email: kaitlin@torontonorthlip.ca www.torontonorthlip.ca/	Contact: Matthew Klaas Tel: (416) 757.7010 ext.2218 Email: mklaas@ccscan.ca www.scarboroughlip.ca	Contact: Paulina Wyrzykowski Tel: (647) 770-2556 Email: tslipdirector@sschto.ca www.torontolip.com

	Theme #1	Theme #2	Theme #3	Other notable answers
HOUSING	**Struggling to pay rent** • Inability to pay rent was the highest concern due to unemployment and an already unaffordable rental market • Landlords unwilling to defer rent	**Problems with landlord** • Many reports of landlords unwilling to rent to recently arrived immigrants out of fear of COVID-19 • Landlords not doing regular maintenance and repairs during the pandemic	**Other** • Overcrowding in houses due to lack of affordability makes physical distancing a challenge or impossible. • Shelters lack space for appropriate distancing	• It was noted that some clients fear eviction – even though evictions are not being enforced at this time • Non-status residents noted as being in the most vulnerable position • At least one report of those working in health care being evicted because of fear that they carry COVID-19
HEALTHCARE	**Barriers to Accessing Healthcare (non-COVID related):** • Avoiding because of fear of catching COVID-19 when accessing services • Unsure how to ask for help • Delayed responses from healthcare providers because they are closed • Language barriers - access to interpretation is limited • Unable to use tech alternatives in place for in-person healthcare • No access because no OHIP (could be avoiding access because think they need but also recorded that SPO not following Ontario directive) • Confusion about how to access health care	**Health effects (non-COVID related):** • Limited access to other urgent care needs e.g. cancer care • Limited tools to manage chronic illness e.g. prescriptions out of stock, pharmacies no longer delivering, not accessing because of fear of catching COVID or information that health services are overwhelmed focusing on COVID • Anxiety, depression caused by not accessing support for chronic or urgent non-COVID needs • Anxiety from being at home all the time and general uncertainty	**COVID related:** • Long wait for telehealth • General fear of pandemic and being infected • Confusion about which sources provide reliable updates	• Culturally appropriate healthcare in short supply • Need for PPE for volunteers serving clients • Immigration status also referenced as an issue for access to healthcare (could be different to OHIP needs)

EMPLOYMENT	**Facing Job Loss/Financial Strain:** • High number of newcomers laid off or concerned they soon will be laid off, loss of hours, loss of secondary part-time work • Industry-specific lay offs, non-essential, small businesses, self-employed closing rapidly, not always eligible for CERB/ROE • Service Providers have high volume of clients in need of support • Acute financial hardship (difficulty accessing food/housing), few structures in place to access support	**Job searching & Access to Resources** • Hiring suspended, interviews on hold, high number of job seekers • Service Providers unsure how to advise - normal techniques ineffective: cold calling, on the spot job applications, networking through friends, events • Available employment not in line with field of expertise, short term, often unstable • Post-pandemic employment unpredictable – hard to predict hiring patterns • Lack of childcare resources makes work from home difficult • Lack of physical employment centres/quiet space to prepare for job search	**Mental Health & Safety** • Unsuccessful job searches leading to frustration and depression • Clients fearful of contracting COVID-19 if they accept essential-service work • Fearful of speaking to employers about Health and Safety, lacking PPE • Mental Health in the family affected with job loss • Difficult to adapt to new online modes of working	• Non-status newcomers not able to access the available employment • Students can't find new jobs, are struggling with education and thus employment delays, summer school not available and often not eligible to receive CERB, entry level jobs are hard to find as most employers are at work from home & there is increased competition.
EDUCATION	**Parents**: • Less time to help children learn as they work from home • Parents lack computer skills, language to heavily support their children learning from home • Increased family conflicts with learn-from home • Hard to get children to focus, and adapt to new online learning, some children really need to learn in person	**Access to Technology** • Large families are struggling to designate time when there is only 1 device available per family • Lack of high speed internet, equipment, and funding to purchase technology, closures of public spaces where internet and computers were available • Low language learners are having difficulty requesting online support	**High School/Adult Learners** • Delaying going to school, or cancelling entirely • Incomplete semesters because of illness/lack of internet access • Many ESL classes and other training opportunities are cancelled, new applications on hold • Struggling to understand online work	

ACCESS TO SERVICES	**Language**: • Language support is required for many newcomers accessing essential services, but settlement services are closed or don't have multi-lingual staff for interpretation • Seniors without language cannot access services/find resources • Difficult to call for resources (like Service Canada) without English	**Access to Technology** • Difficult to access what Service Providers have to offer without technology, digital literacy, knowledge of navigation of systems, appropriate information, time (caring for children for example) • Limited funds to purchase technology • Clients used to in-person services hard to adjust, and no free services (library, computers)	**Service Availability**: • Some fields not appropriate for virtual services (i.e children with behavioural challenges) • Unsure what is available and when, including food banks, government offices, community services • Increased wait times (ex. Immigration Services, Service Canada, OW, ODSP) • Afraid to access medical services due to COVID-19	• Hearing dates are on hold which prolongs the closure of statuses,
WOMEN	**Unsafe to be at home:** • Domestic violence, from partner and children • Violence is exacerbated because of isolation and stress • Because of this, more difficult for women to access services and supports (for violence support and all other needs), and in a timely manner • Unable to leave and enter shelter system due to COVID-19 risk and no capacity	**Physical health and mental wellbeing needs:** • Lack of social network • Easy to fall quickly into hopelessness with piling responsibilities • Staying healthy as a pregnant mother and facing uncertainty of childbirth • Getting insufficient rest, quickly leading to burn-out • Access to baby and menstrual hygiene supplies that would usually come from programs now limited/ disappeared	**Multiple roles = compounding sources of stress:** • Looking after children, while working or looking for work, and home-schooling • Supporting older family members • Especially challenging for single mothers • Multiple home and job roles, now with no physical role division that family can see = increased expectations • Managing health and social distancing of older children who want to go out and spend time with friends • Managing family needs on limited resources	• Need for culturally appropriate resources and language specific services • If a woman facing these challenges also has no status, they are particularly vulnerable • Women are seeking skills and language training

Seniors	**Health:** • Now more vulnerable (physically and emotionally) • Worsened health for ongoing conditions as accessing healthcare is more difficult • Food security and access to proper nutrition is a challenge • Depression developing from staying home alone, anxiety from the unknown, and in need of counselling. • Fear of leaving home because of the risk • Seniors in long-term care homes witnessing effects of significant levels of Covid19 e.g. large numbers of friends and neighbours passing away • They are at severe risk of Covid19 and its effects	**Isolation:** • Lack confidence using tech to get online • Difficult for SPOs to reach seniors • Limited to their current living space from being a high-risk population • Limited funds available means less phone minutes or data for connecting • Lessened physical contact and interaction can feel like lessened care • Unable to see friends, family	**Heavily reliant on others:** • Cannot pick up groceries - dependent on friends, families, neighbours and/or services if available • Need others for language support to find out what support is available and get access to it • Need others or transit to get around	• Messaging during lockdown is not clear or directed to newcomers
MENTAL HEALTH	**Not able to access usual supports that keep people on track:** • Not able to go to religious space and connect with faith • Not able to access green space • Social isolation is increased and common esp. for people living alone and seniors	**Increased demand, SPOs adapting as fast as possible to keep up:** • Newcomers with PTSD and trauma being triggered • Increased need for family counselling • SPOs not feeling qualified to respond to sudden common need for MH support • Long wait times for access MH support	**Barriers to access (which can also exacerbate ongoing MH needs):** • Cannot access range of support styles that were previously available which were most suitable for that individual e.g. group, in-person • Language barriers create greater feeling of isolation	• Each factor compounds and many newcomers are affected by many of the factors at a time: the unknown, family stress, misinformation, too much information, ongoing mental and physical health needs, economical stress, job precarity, fear of COVID-19, balancing family

				needs, not clear about what is going on now
FOOD SECURITY	**Food security is worse** • People are simply not able to buy the food they need due to lack of income • Non-status residents who have lost jobs don't have government income programs to rely on for food money • Clients are asking for help to get food to eat • Some rely on a sponsor who has lots their source of income	**Food Banks** • There is a large increase in clients asking for information about and referral to food banks • Some lack culturally appropriate food • Change in hours, location, or simply closing means that some are harder to access	**Vulnerable clients** • Some vulnerable clients either cannot shop for themselves, or must expose themselves to risk in order to shop (seniors, people with disabilities) • Some seniors don't have credit cards or cash on hard to pay volunteers to shop • Delivery fees have gone up and the wait time for delivery is so long many cannot wait for food	• Those without room to store food must shop more than the recommended once a week maximum • Some parents cannot leave their kids at home or with others, and must take them food shopping and feel as though they are exposing their children to risk • Community gardens can help address food security, there needs to be a plan to open them during this time of physical distancing
TRANSPORTATION	**Public Transit** • Many fear being exposed to COVID-19 on public transportation • Physical distancing isn't always practiced by all riders, some report crowded vehicles • Some would like to wear PPE on transit but don't have access	**Public Transit** • For many, public transit remains the only way they can get to work, shop for food, and get to medical appointments • At least one report of someone choosing to stop working because of fear of taking public transit and	**Public Transit** • Lack of income means that public transit is also unaffordable • Those who must take transit to shop cannot buy in bulk and must shop more often, thus exposing themselves to more risk by shopping more than the	

		having no other way of traveling to work	recommended one time per week	
YOUTH	**Employment** • Youth have lost jobs and finding a job is difficult with the lack of hiring • Those still employed risk potential exposure to COVID-19 at work and are living with fear of being exposed, particularly those working in front-line services	**Family** • Many youth are caregivers to younger siblings while also working a front-line job, and having to do school work - feeling overworked and stressed • There is conflict with parents regarding over-use of screens, and parents worried about their children's education	**Health and Mental Health** • Many are bored and frustrated • Lack of "way to blow of steam", lack of social contact is challenging • The situation exacerbates existing anxiety and depression for some	**Education** • Some families lack the devices and internet access for youth to do schooling • Youth are more challenging to contact, including street involved youth • One agency has seen a substantial increase in refugee youth
OTHER	• Help filing taxes is needed • Warm clothing is needed for children and teenagers • There's no place for people living in shelters to hang out during the day while the shelters are closed			
What is the greatest need in the newcomer community you serve which cannot be met by your organization at the present time?	**Computer Technology** • Access to computers, the internet and other technologies • If people aren't technologically literate, we cannot serve them well in this time • Languages classes are inaccessible for people without technological skills	**Income and basics of life** • Shelter • Food security, • Access to affordable housing • Income security	**Status and access to services** • There is nowhere to refer people without legal status for many services - they are particularly vulnerable	