

Learning from Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants

Community Engagement Forum

Calgary, Alberta Site Report
August 11, 2019
Arts Commons Learning Centre

Based on notes by Gabriel Abes and Angelo Bodoso

Prepared by Edwin Chavez and Ilyan Ferrer

Mmessage from Joshua Dalledonne, Producing and Engagement Associate for Arts Commons.

Thank you so very much for the opportunity to welcome you into Arts Commons and I hope that this is one of many visits for you, your friends and your family. I am travelling today, otherwise I would certainly be there with you to share these thoughts! The opportunity to participate in events like the Immigrant Seniors Project, are particularly meaningful for Arts Commons as a way to build community through the arts. We aim for the spaces here to be a gathering place for all Calgarians and we're grateful that you chose to spend your time here today. As always, if you'd like to share your thoughts I would like to hear them – please do not hesitate to email or call: jdalledonne@artscommons.ca or 403-294-7455, extension 1451.

- Josh Dalledonne



Acknowledgements

Land acknowledgement

Welcome to the University of Calgary. We would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional territories of the people of the Treaty 7 region in Southern Alberta, which includes the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), as well as the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bearspaw, and Wesley First Nations). The City of Calgary is also home to Métis Nation of Alberta, Region III.

Research team

Ilyan Ferrer (University of Calgary, Faculty of Social Work)
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Partners



Funders



Social Sciences and Humanities
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I. Introduction

Project overview

The “Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants: Photovoice Project” is a Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) funded art exhibit that shares the stories, perspectives and photos of older racialized immigrants in Montreal, Quebec and Vancouver, British Columbia. Many people have contributed to ensure the success of this project, which showcases the challenges and strategies that older racialized immigrants face in accessing supports and services throughout their lives. The findings of our research highlight the experiences of (1) poverty, (2) precarious housing, (3) difficulties in accessing health care, (4) well-being and meaningful social connections for immigrant seniors, and (5) stories of resistance and resilience. The project hosts Photovoice exhibits in Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal and Quebec City.

Research team

The Calgary site is led by Dr. Ilyan Ferrer, an assistant professor at the University of Calgary’s Faculty of Social Work; and in partnership with Action Dignity. ActionDignity is a community-based organization that facilitates the collective voice and action of ethnocultural communities to pursue the vision of a just and equitable society for all. It uses collaboration to create positive impacts for individuals, families, communities and systems. It has a membership of more than 70 ethnocultural organizations and individual members, and wide-ranging collaborative relationships with service providers, institutions and policy makers. Our research team includes:

- Marichu Antonio (Executive director, Action Dignity)
- Maribel Javier (Calgary site coordinator, Action Dignity)
- Mae Chavez (Forum facilitator, University of Calgary)
- Edwin Chavez (Forum facilitator, University of Calgary)
- Gabriel Abes (Notetaker, University of Calgary)
- Angelo Bodoso (Notetaker, University of Calgary)

Description of Calgary Site Report

The forum was held on August 11, 2018, with different stakeholders– mostly representing seniors’ service organizations in Calgary. These organizations included: The Centre for Newcomers, Immigrant Services Calgary, Calgary Catholic Immigrant Services, Calgary The forum was centered along the viewing of a photovoice exhibit, titled the Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants, which facilitated discussions on the topic of “*Social Inclusion and Community Engagement.*”

The forum was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). It is one of a series of forums and workshops to be held across four metropolitan centres (Greater Vancouver, Calgary, Montreal, and Quebec City). Following completion of the forums, a consolidated project report will be released to participants.

The forum was organized in partnership with ActionDignity Society (formerly Ethno-Cultural Council of Calgary). Executive Director, Marichu Antonio, offered a framework detailing how Action Dignity identifies barriers being faced by the older adults. Her situational analysis also provided pathways wherein community organizations and policy makers might work with older adults to address social inclusion and foster social inclusion. Dr. Ilyan Ferrer, the lead of the Calgary site, offered a cursory introduction to the exhibit and how discussions were being held across four sites (Montreal, Quebec City, Calgary and Vancouver).

This site report for the *Calgary Community Engagement Forum* summarizes the key themes and ideas that were discussed during the forum and the final concluding plenary discussion that occurred at the end of the forum. Discussion of the specific theme occurred as a part of World Café style discussions, where small groups of 5-6 people discussed the theme. The concluding discussion at the end of the forum consisted of a broader group discussion.

Please note that the opinions contained in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the research team or all participants in attendance, but rather reflect the diversity of the views and comments made by all of our participants



Selected slides from the “Lived Experiences of Aging Immigrants” Keynote by By Marichu Antonio

Lived Experience of Aging Immigrants

Marichu Antonio

Executive Director, ActionDignity

August 11. 2019



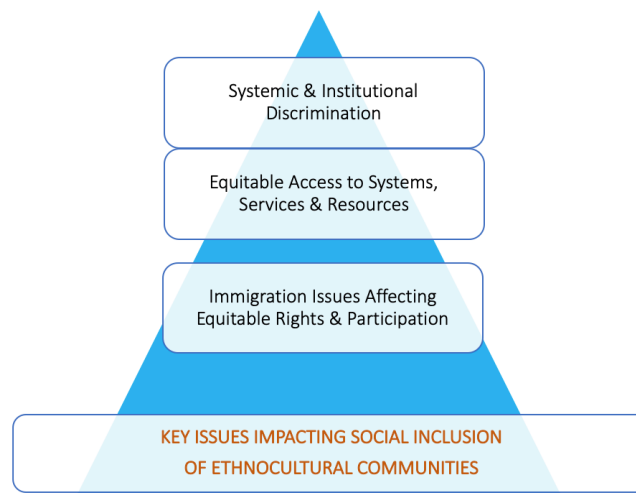
Participant overview Intersectoral dialogue and exchange

- Sectors:
 - service provider organizations, immigrant-serving organizations
 - ethnocultural community organizations, volunteers, advocates
 - government, public institutions
 - academe
- Key areas of work
 - program delivery
 - peer support
 - policy making
 - community services
 - advocacy
 - etc.

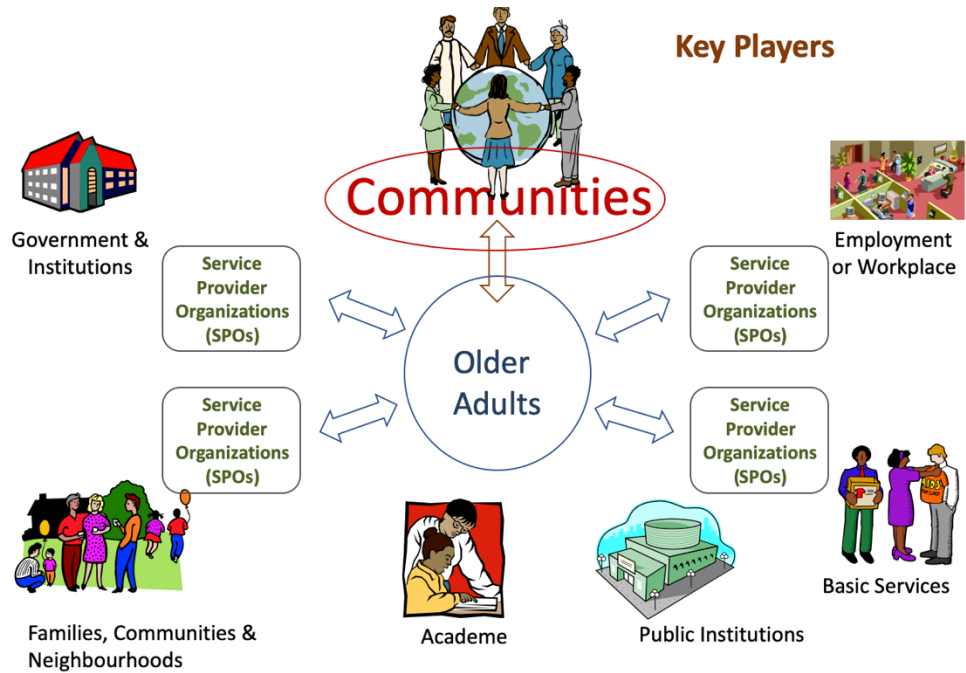
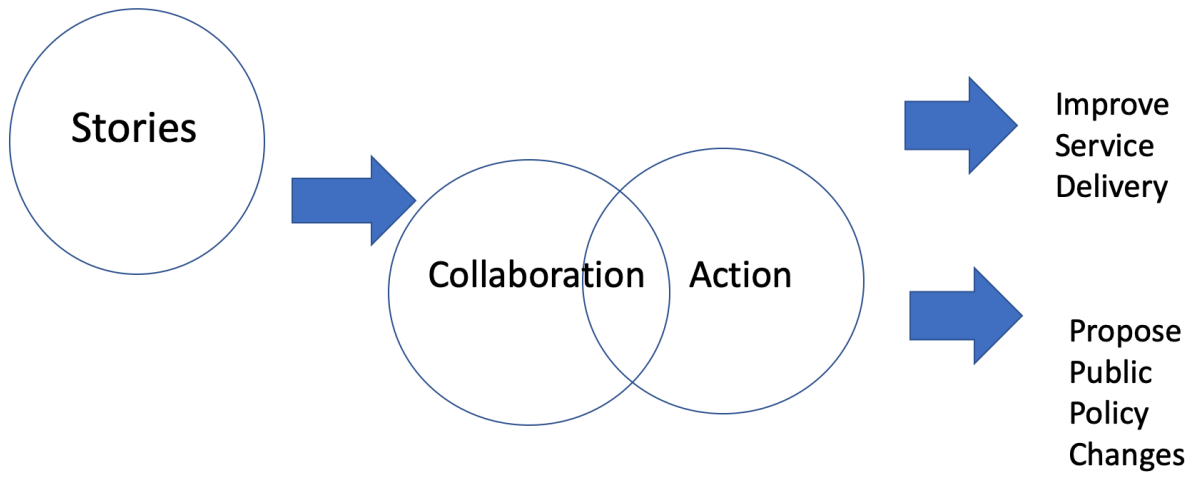
Themes from Stories

- **1. *Caregiving, Family and Home Care***: the challenges of caregiving
 - intergenerational, local, and transnational family members
 - gaps in access and equity within homecare services.
- **2. *Housing and Transportation***: challenges of
 - affordable housing and accessible transportation
 - highlighting intersections with disability.
- **3. *Social Inclusion and Community Engagement***: social exclusion
 - impact of precarious employment and trauma in the past
 - communities and service providers include and engage older adults
 - engaging supportive networks

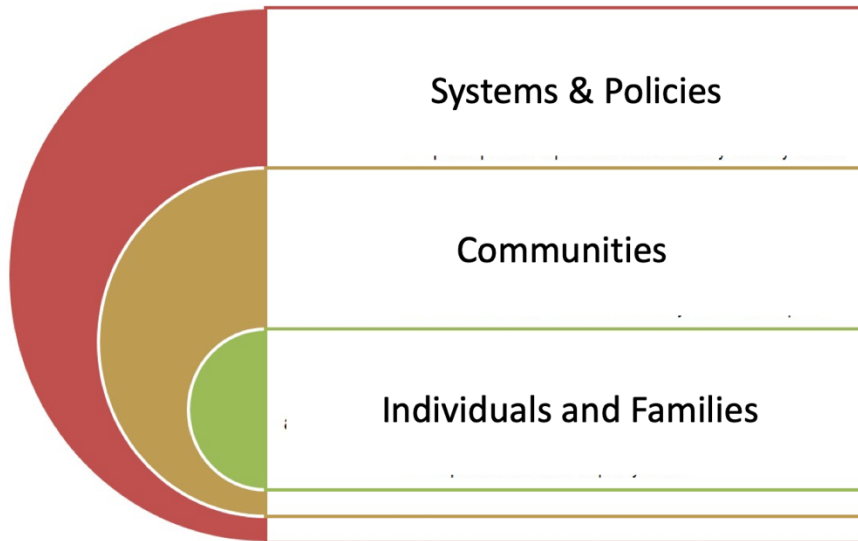
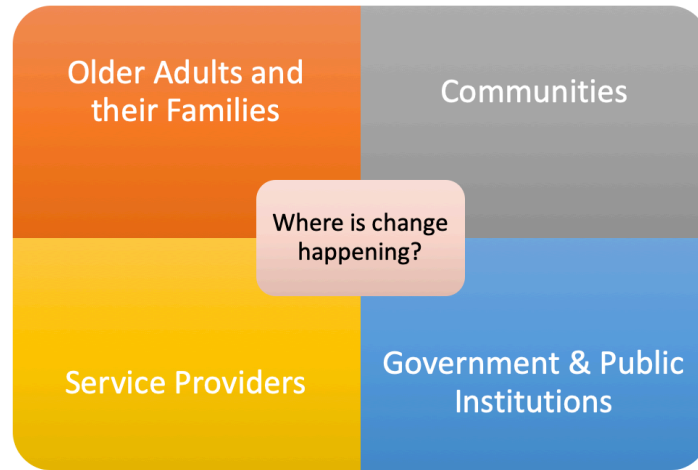
Root causes of Issues



How do we address issues, gaps, challenges?



How Immigration Impacts Older Adults



Arenas of Action and Change

Impact

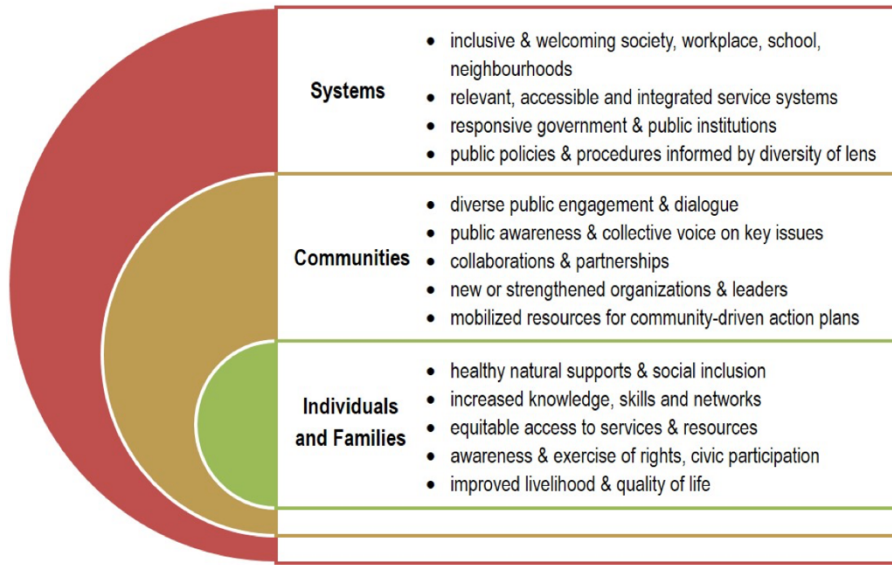
Individuals and Families

- healthy natural supports & social inclusion
- increased knowledge, skills and networks
- equitable access to services & resources
- awareness & exercise of rights, civic participation
- improved livelihood & quality of life

Impact

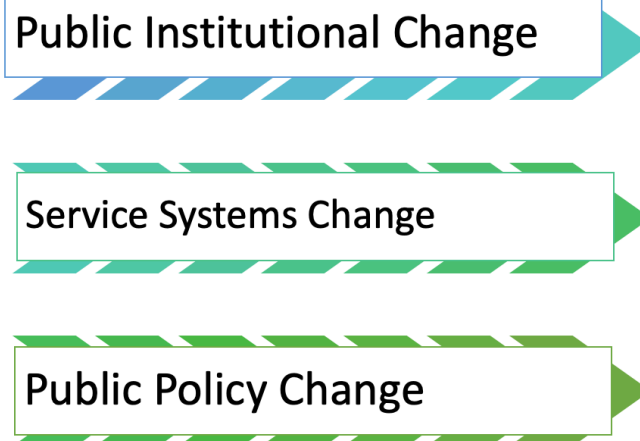
Communities

- diverse public engagement & dialogue
- public awareness & collective voice on key issues
- collaborations & partnerships
- new or strengthened organizations & leaders
- mobilized resources for community-driven action plans



Arenas of Action and Change

Arenas of System Change

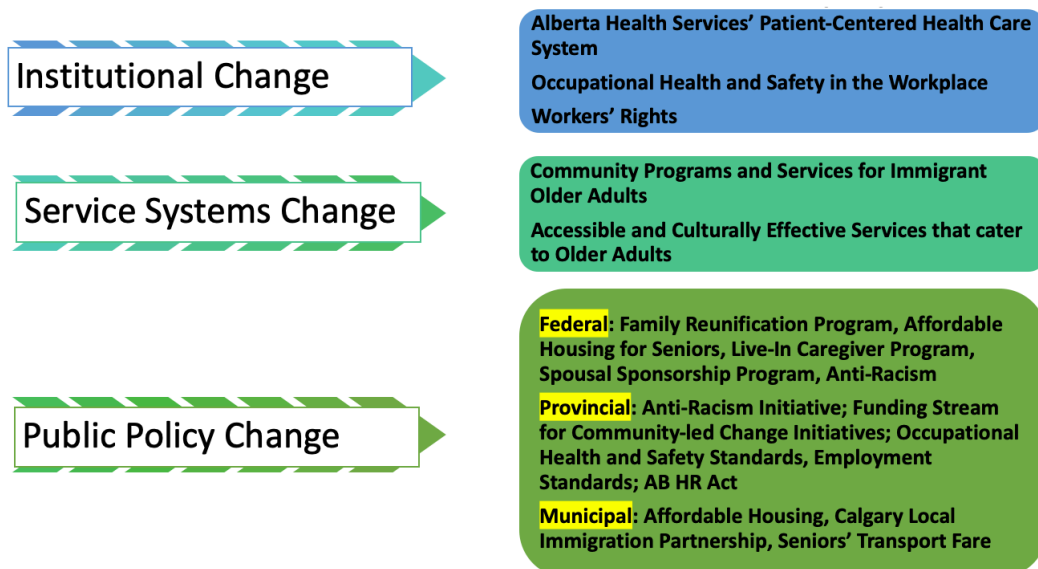


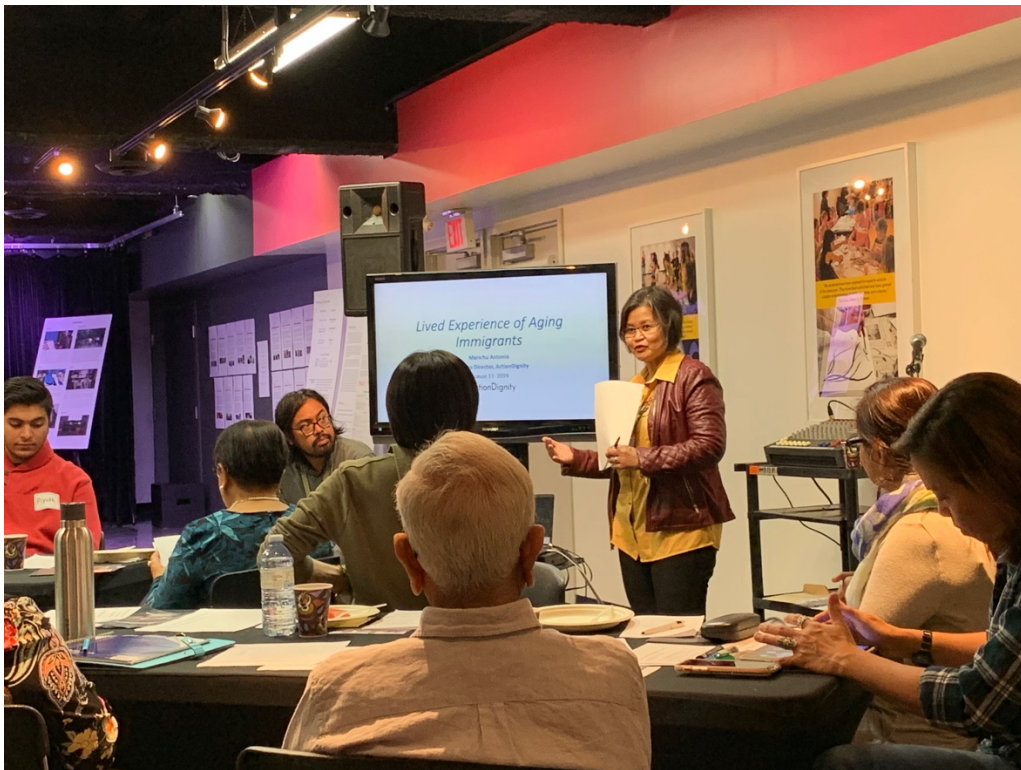
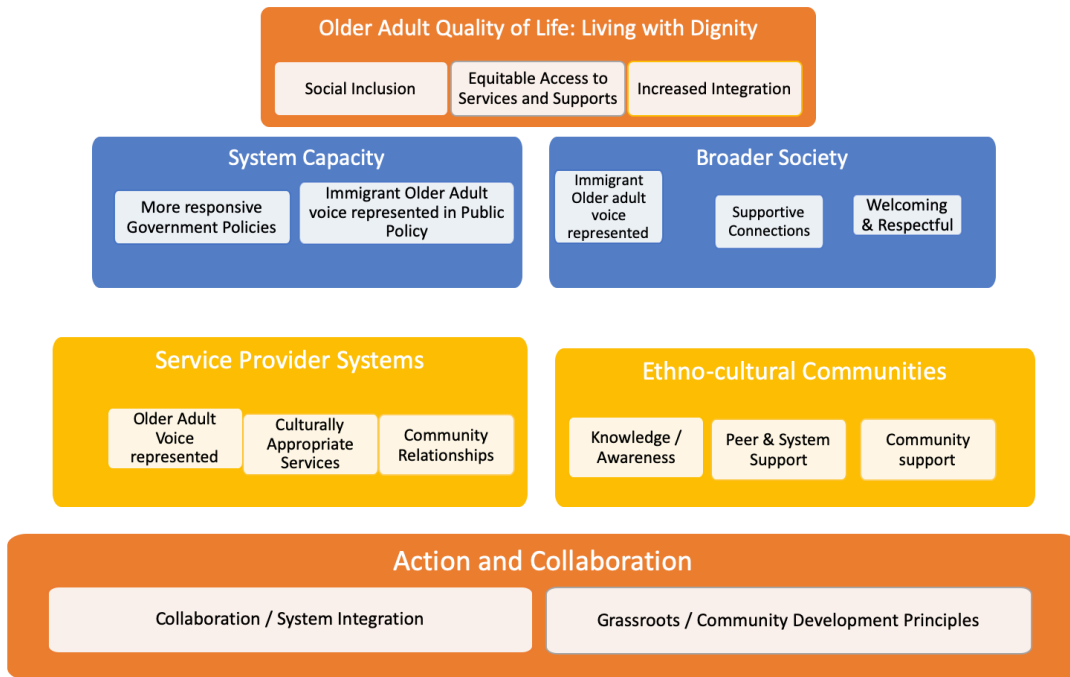
Some Policy Recommendations on Family Sponsorship of Grandparents

- Remove the quota (10,000 applications per year) on Parent and Grandparent Sponsorship
- Devote resources to processing all family class applications, including Parents and Grandparents, in a timely manner
- In light of the barriers already facing racialized immigrant families, lower the Minimum Necessary Income for sponsoring parents and grandparents
- Reduce sponsorship undertaking period to 10 years instead of the current 20
- Do not treat the Family Super Visa as a replacement for a meaningful family reunification program for parents and grandparents.

Arenas of System Change

Arenas of Change





III. World Café Discussion



The first significant part of the forum was a table discussion called “World Café.” Participants were asked to discuss two questions. The participants were divided into two groups/tables to discuss the posed questions.

Question 1: What are your impressions about community engagement in relation to immigrant older adults based on viewing the exhibit?

There are several factors that hinder the participation of older adults in community engagement. The following are the factors and reasons that the participants identified as preventing older adults from engaging with the community:

Poverty being experienced by older adults prevent them from actively engaging in the community

- Seniors still have to work to support families they left behind from their home countries. Earning a living is prioritized over participating in community activities.
- If able to take subsidy in the cases of financially burdened families, the priority isn't on transportation and connecting with other older adults
- A participant also pointed out that income from the pension of older adults are also placed into the income of the household, especially if the family is struggling financially thus older adults having a feeling of no control over their finances.
- Sponsorship causes a lot of problems and abuse in terms of the financial aspect resulting in the cascade in the note above.

Language/Cultural/Technological barriers

There are barriers around language, culture and technology that restrict immigrant older adults to become more active in community engagement. Although recognizing that seniors have their potentials to become leaders and resilient, these barriers need to be addressed to maximize their potentials to bring them to mainstream community.

Language barriers:

- Although English classes are free, however, seniors try to avoid using the money for bus tickets in cases of poverty without subsidy
- Now we have more opportunities to deal with issues, but seniors have limited abilities.
- Children of seniors emotionally abuse their parents resulting in fear of talking and turning to the support of the community and service providers

Cultural barriers

- Older immigrants are also busy in doing domestic chores like attending to young children and taking care of the house. Even if seniors have the opportunity to connect with the community and children are allowing them, seniors feel a cultural pressure to stay home and take care of the grandchildren.
- A lot of the time seniors have cultural barriers, especially with regards to women. In some communities, women are expected to stay at home.
- Some participants opined that there is a certain level of abuse by sponsoring older adults and ending up locked in doing household chores and attending to their children.
- Culture shock prevents some seniors from being more active

Technological barriers

- Major divide in intergenerational work (technological barrier), secondary to the immigrant older adults language barriers as a way of supporting their families
- However, there are some success stories that are taking place that breaks the technology barrier although it is a slow process which should be greatly encouraged and accelerated

Isolation

Isolation is one of the things that have to be addressed for immigrant older adults to participate fully in community activities. Language barriers and restriction in terms of mobility are some of the causes that isolate seniors to connect with other members of the community. The following are some additional observations that are related to isolation of seniors:

- The seniors have hesitation and do not want to come out of their shells. They are concerned about what their family and other community members will think about them. They have issues about exposing themselves, especially seniors who suffer abuse from own family members.
- Vietnamese seniors support their children and grandchildren by taking care of the household chores and reducing daycare costs, thus resulting in isolation from their community. If the economic situation were better at home (not serving their children in household labour) they would be able to connect with their own immigrant older adult communities.
- Age is a factor to the levels of isolation; the older the seniors get, the greater the isolation because of physical and mental health, financial situation, housing and home care.
- It is harder for immigrants of colour to bring their parents here than their European counterparts, but immigrant seniors have to address the barrier of isolation. Senior immigrants of colour face more challenges as opposed to seniors of European descent.

Mobility

The issue of mobility for seniors was also discussed as one of the barriers to immigrant older adults community engagement. Senior immigrants have a lot to offer, but they have transportation issues

- Transportation, especially busing, is not well developed in new communities where new immigrants are. Even in the communities where immigrants are more settled and developed, busing times are not practical and exhausting for a senior, and they are then put off by the effort and time to travel

- Drivers license are challenging to pursue and achieve due to physical aspects of an ageing body thus lowering their ability to achieve enough level of transportation for seniors to consistently engage in community activities

Gender issues

Participants were also able to identify gender concerns that restrict full participation of immigrant older adults in community engagement. This concern is also related to cultural beliefs and stereotypes.

- These women do not go to events unless their kids are going
- Older gentlemen go out more
- A lot of south Asian women think they have very limited roles in the household,

Lack of awareness

Lack of awareness and proper education on issues, resources and programs about older adults persist given that there are already resources available both from the government and non-profit service providers.

- Lack of awareness for and among seniors in media and publications,
- There are more youth and family-orientated activities, but there is nothing for seniors.
- One of the reasons identified why this is still happening is the gap between the community and service providers. There is a lack of communication between service providers and community about information to cover a higher number of seniors to be aware of their rights, programs and services.
- There is also a gap between service providers themselves. There is lack of coordination, communication and cohesion among and between the different service providers for seniors thus the delivery of service and programs to seniors are not fully maximized. Most of the service provides are mandate driven and cannot go beyond their mandate i.e. collaboration with other service providers.

Positive experiences

However, there are positive experiences already achieved in older adults with regards to community engagement.

- Older adults have lots to offer, but they have barriers and restrictions
- Immigrants who have become seniors may also show resilience.
- Someone said they have been volunteering and advocating for domestic violence
- A lot of the seniors are self-directed and very active and self-motivated. There are already senior organizations formed in different cultures and communities. The seniors have started building awareness, conducting community initiatives like yoga, health and fitness program, writing books and being engaged in arts.
- One of the participants said, "Now that Canada is our country, there must be a 'hookup' to the mainstream. I had a harder time convincing organizations before to participate in community activities for immigrant older adults. But through the years of commitment and dedication, seniors are getting involved."



General Observations/ Insights

There are also general observations on the experiences of older adults that can be considered in the study of immigrant seniors related to community engagement.

- The seniors' stories are similar based on their past experiences; the issues nowadays are still the same everywhere in Canada.
- One of the participants asked, "What can we tell about the community in the way they respond to seniors? How can the community integrate seniors instead of how can seniors integrate into the community?"
- Older immigrants have multiple roles in the community instead of their perceived roles. They have more providing roles.
- Seniors have an innate character of being a leader because of their experiences in life, but their restrictions prevent them from showing their leadership skills. This is why community engagement is not as well embedded as other seniors due to restrictions.
- There were more white immigrants back then, but now the resiliency of racialized immigrants is being tested.
- It is harder to start a life from zero in a different country at a later age, which makes the seniors more vulnerable.
- People don't question the 20 year dependency period anymore which means we accept the idea that those who did not survive for that long do not deserve OAS
- Immigration poses lots of challenges and being a senior adds even more problems.
- Many immigrants who are now turning into seniors have resolved the challenges of immigration while becoming seniors.
- Issues are amplified when you become a senior while still being an isolated immigrant.
- Immigrant seniors are much more vulnerable compared to others with regards to discrimination.
- We can still categorize strata of immigrant seniors based on immigration date. Immigrants now vs immigrants of the past because this causes different experiences and problems. All agencies and policy planners must recognize these differences.
- To get seniors to engage in the community, barriers must be overcome.

Q2: What actions do we need to take in order to remove barriers/build on strengths?

The following are the suggestions and recommendations of participants for Calgary to facilitate effective and meaningful participation of immigrant older adults in community engagement.

Start with what the seniors have

- "Why do we not hear from the immigrant older adults that are successful? As we (service providers) come from a marginalized mindset, almost vulnerable, we must tap into the other side of the story." Most of the times, we focus on dealing with the challenges and issues of seniors, but we can also draw learnings from the positive experiences of successful

seniors. These experiences can help motivate other seniors to become more active in participating in community actions and for helping uplift their personal lives as well.

Build and strengthen collaboration and advocacy

- Strengthen advocacy as a voice for seniors.
- Existing collaborations should continue what they are doing and escalate it to include awareness and education.

Increase awareness and capability building

- Awareness should be raised with family members due to the isolation the seniors may face. More focus should be given on the issues of sponsorship, elder abuse, cross-cultural literacy, health program, and outreach program.
- Education should start from grassroots, low income to higher income.
- Education and awareness for seniors, a lot of information is spread through word of mouth in the community however the truly isolated seniors do not have access to any information mostly due to hiding because of health bills.

Improve access to transportation services

- Improve and increase transportation accessibility to different communities. Community associations should be connected with the public transportation system.
- Increase efficiency or having affordable specific charter routes to increase senior community engagement.

Policy development

- Federal collective action to address senior issues with the upcoming election.
- Accountability forum would give an opportunity to have policymakers to show they are accountable.

Improve service delivery for older adults

- Have youth more engaged to promote intergenerational education.

- Provide translators from different services providers. Translators from service providers shall encourage more immigrant older adults to engage better who are experiencing isolation because of language barriers.
- Home care services, more accessible and culturally sensitive. Home care and housing should be culturally sensitive to allow older seniors to still enjoy food and their time with these situations with a caretaker or at a nursing home.
- Increase and expand cultural literacy programs. Different cultures work differently in a professional setting, so cross-cultural education is essential for seniors to understand what is socially acceptable to avoid verbal and emotional abuse towards elders. For example, the elder Chinese in Calgary have their own nursing home with a chef who cooks traditional Chinese food that Chinese older adults enjoy and are comfortable with which significantly improves their quality of life.
- Programs that encourage building self-esteem such as cooking which seniors share their recipes is helpful in connecting through a language barrier between immigrant older adults.

Engage youth and middle class

- Engage youth and bridge cross-generational gap between youth and seniors.
- Mentoring on building student relationship to connect the experiences of the seniors with the youth Adopted grandma” where youth engage with seniors in a friendly atmosphere.
- Educate and engage motivated middle-class immigrant older adults.

IV. Plenary Discussion



The second part of the forum was a plenary discussion to identify actions that need to be taken to remove barriers, identify gaps and identify key actors to address seniors issues and concerns. There were three questions posed to roll the discussion. The first question was, “How do each of the table themes connect to the solutions?” The second question was, “Are there any gaps in understanding that preclude action right now?”, and the third question was “Who needs to be responsible for the action?”

Question 1: How do each of the table’s themes connect to the solutions?

- Strong thoughts about allowing the seniors to collaborate with service providers on a community level, which will not only increase the level participation within the community.
- Instead of just inviting senior to attend government consultations, seniors can initiate in holding “Accountability Forum” that may be attended by at least 1,000 seniors to discuss issues on seniors, dialogue with state parliamentarians and legislators, and have elected officials report back to the 1000 seniors on their actions to show their accountability. In this

way, seniors will be more pro-active in engaging not only with the community but with the government as well.

- The policymakers are not fully aware of the plight of the seniors. Have elected officials report back to the 1000 seniors on their actions to show their accountability.

Question 2: Are there any gaps in understanding that preclude action right now?

- Restricted jobs result in family dynamics and ruptured relationships. This impacts seniors not to reach out to other members of the community and confine themselves at home. Most of the seniors want to be independent but are restricted because of the barriers identified.
- Improve services for immigrant seniors and make services more culturally sensitive, e.g. homecare.
- There should be a national strategy to address seniors' issues (which is akin to unemployment insurance).
- Seniors and its advocates need to engage housing corporations to make housing more accessible, i.e. more bedrooms for intergenerational families, or a design that is more seniors friendly.

Question 3: Who needs to be responsible for action:

- Seniors themselves
 - Seniors should spearhead in undertaking actions.
 - Family members should be aware of the situation of seniors.
 - Immigrant seniors should be willing to accept a new culture.
- Federal government/provincial/municipal
 - Housing
 - Services need to interact with the seniors themselves along with creating an intergenerational viewpoint Who is responsible for addressing disintegrated communities?
 - Who needs to address the integration of a Canadian community?
- Educational institutions
 - Schools for seniors may be established to provide education and awareness on intergenerational issues and early intervention.
- Consulate and cultural community
 - Cross-generational testimony
- Law enforcement agencies

- Community leaders

