



Supporting Newcomers through Collaboration: Findings from HIPC Fall 2025 Community Forum

Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC)

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Executive Summary

This report compiles reflections and insights shared at HIPC's November 2025 Community Forum in response to the [Hamilton Immigrant Survey 2025](#) findings. Through panel and table discussions, newcomers, service providers, and community partners shared lived and professional perspectives on settlement experiences, and the settlement landscape in Hamilton:

- Across discussions, participants emphasized that settlement is shaped by **interconnected and cyclical barriers** related to employment, housing, income, language access, education, and 'legal' status.
- **Employment**-related discussions highlighted the need to expand paid internships, credential recognition support, as well as training and bridging programs. Participants emphasized the importance of strengthening connections with employers through workforce summits, job fairs, and rights-based education.
- **Housing** discussions focused on affordability, suitability, and experiences of discrimination and how they affected newcomers' mental and physical well-being. Participants called for stronger tenant education, eviction prevention resources, and collective advocacy for public and subsidized housing.
- **Language access** remains a foundational concern. Participants stressed the importance of expanded language training across proficiency levels.
- Discussions on **isolation and discrimination** emphasized the need to embed mental health supports across settlement services, strengthen civic engagement opportunities, and promote public education that counter xenophobic narratives.
- Participants **identified gaps in information access and system navigation**, pointing to the need for clearer multilingual service information and coordinated intake and referral systems.
- There was an emphasis on the importance of **advocacy** to address cost-of-living pressures, immigration-related fees, barriers to post-secondary education, and broader economic and socio-legal barriers.
- Participants stressed the importance of **community collaborations** and practices grounded in strong partnerships and long-term, prevention-oriented supports.

- Forum discussions underscored newcomers' **intersecting identities and precarious status** as barriers to accessing settlement services and supports.
- The forum identified several **areas for further research**, including how newcomers define 'belonging' and participation, how housing suitability shapes inclusion, how the City of Hamilton can promote civic engagement among newcomers prior to acquiring permanent residency and citizenship, and how funding instability affects the long-term sustainability of settlement programs.

Findings in this report will inform HIPC's ongoing community planning, advocacy, and partnership-building to strengthen access to supports, and meaningful participation for newcomers.

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Thank you to all the forum participants who volunteered to facilitate table discussions, take notes, and share them with HIPC to include in this report.

About Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC):

HIPC is a community table whose members work together to create a positive settlement experience for newcomers. HIPC members represent settlement agencies, educational institutions, the private sector, municipal departments, persons with lived experiences of immigration, and more. HIPC is funded by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) and housed within the City of Hamilton's Economic Development Division. To learn more, visit www.hamiltonimmigration.ca.

Land Acknowledgement:

The City of Hamilton is situated upon the traditional territories of the Erie, Neutral, Huron-Wendat, Haudenosaunee and Mississaugas. This land is covered by the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, which was an agreement between the Haudenosaunee and Anishinaabek to share and care for the resources around the Great Lakes. We further acknowledge that this land is covered by the Between the Lakes Purchase, 1792, between the Crown and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Today, the City of Hamilton is home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island (North America) and we recognize that we must do more to learn about the rich history of this land so that we can better understand our roles as residents, neighbours, partners and caretakers.

Introduction

Hamilton Immigration Partnership Council (HIPC) held a Community Forum entitled: *Supporting Newcomers through Collaboration* on November 13, 2025. The aim of the forum was to provide a space for collective reflection, dialogue, and shared sense-making among immigrants, newcomers, service providers, community leaders, and organizational partners across different sectors in Hamilton.

The forum was guided by the findings from the [Hamilton Immigrant Survey 2025](#), the second largest survey of immigrants in Hamilton that engaged immigrants and newcomers to share their experiences, challenges, contributions and suggestions. The forum centered the theme of collaboration as a guiding value and practical framework for understanding and addressing the non-linear and deeply interconnected barriers to settlement and belonging.

The forum brought together approximately 120 attendees, including community members and representatives from close to 40 organizations across settlement, public, private, non-profit, and grassroots sectors. Participants brought both professional and lived experience perspectives as the majority of those who completed a post-event survey (63.5% of 57 participants) identified as having lived experience of migration.

This report seeks to synthesize reflections gathered during the forum, with particular attention to how participants understood the Hamilton Immigrant Survey 2025 findings, identified existing community assets, and articulated priorities for collective action. This report reflects on multifaceted patterns and tensions arising from pressing social issues, concerns, and needs that affect newcomers and immigrant populations in different yet interconnected ways.

How was the Community Engaged?

Community engagement served as a foundation for the forum, creating a shared space for participants to collectively make sense of the [2025 Hamilton Immigrant Survey Report](#) findings and co-create meaningful next steps. Community engagement included three interconnected components.

1. A presentation on the 2025 Hamilton Immigrant Survey Report Findings.
2. A panel discussion bringing together organizational leaders from the sectors of housing, settlement, civic inclusion, and an individual with lived experience of migration to reflect on the survey findings.
3. Thirteen facilitated table discussions documented in a written format by note takers at each table. Discussions structured around three prompts:
 - I. Reflections on Hamilton Immigrant Survey 2025 Findings:
 - i. Does this resonate? In your own work? In your personal life? Any reactions?
 - ii. Is there a specific area of interest from the Hamilton Immigrant Survey that you would like to see further research on?
 - II. Existing Community Assets
 - i. In your own work or personal life, what are you doing to address challenges or strengthen assets reported by newcomers in the Hamilton Immigrant Survey?
 - III. Suggested Actions
 - i. Are there resources, supports, or collaborations that you want to see in order to improve the experiences of newcomers in Hamilton?

Key Themes

The forum was guided by findings from the [Hamilton Immigrant Survey 2025](#). Participants engaged with the findings by sharing their reflections and experiences. The following are key themes that emerged out of the panel and facilitated table discussions. A summary of the key themes and calls to action can also be found in Appendix I.

1. Interconnected Socio-Economic Barriers

The panel discussed the prevalence of socio-economic barriers and how they inhibit access to basic needs and disrupt socio-cultural integration and well-being.

1.1. Income and Employment

Participants noted that while affordability pressures are affecting residents across Hamilton and nationwide, income disparities remain significantly more pronounced among newcomer immigrant populations.

Similar to the Hamilton Immigrant Survey 2025 findings, panelists reflected on how employment insecurity, underemployment, and income inadequacy continue to prevail as defining features of many immigrants' settlement experiences. Panelists emphasized how these interconnected socio-economic realities not only reflect a competitive job market, but also structural barriers that devalue international expertise and qualifications. Employment-related barriers included lengthy and bureaucratic foreign credential recognition processes, lack of recognition of international education and work experience, and employer expectations around 'Canadian experience' despite prohibitions against its use in job postings.

Panelists further noted that lack of accessible and paid internship opportunities remained a critical gap to achieving meaningful employment, leaving many newcomers without viable pathways to gain local experience without financial strain. Together, these dynamics were described as intensifying underemployment, and where newcomers are left occupying precarious survival jobs with limited stability, low wages, and little opportunity for advancement.

During table discussions, employment challenges were similarly described as both immediate and significant. Participants highlighted limited access to appropriate employment, career pathways and bridging programs as key barriers shaping early settlement and contributing to financial pressure. Attendees noted that taking on survival employment as a means of meeting immediate basic needs systematically sidelines and invalidates newcomers' professional training, credentials, and accumulated experience.

Table discussions also highlighted growing concerns regarding employment discrimination linked to immigration status. Participants described how temporary or precarious status can limit mobility within the labour market, resulting in prolonged wage stagnation and restricted role advancement.

1.2. Language and Education

During the panel, language training access emerged as a foundational issue across all aspects of settlement. Panelists emphasized pressing concerns regarding ongoing funding cuts and eligibility changes to language training given the importance of language proficiency in accessing employment, education and various other aspects of civic life.

Panel reflections emphasized how cuts in advanced language training directly affect employment and access to post-secondary education. Participants noted that these cuts lead to the exclusion of many newcomers from opportunities necessary to meet admission or program requirements within educational institutions and to meaningfully participate in the labour market. Testimonies pointed to the compounding effects of service closures and extended waitlists. When language centres close and lower their ESL levels offered, newcomers are left with limited options or alternatives that are financially inaccessible.

Panelists also raised concerns about cuts to post-secondary language education core funding, questioning the broader impacts of these reductions on newcomers, refugees, migrants, and international students. Language training and education were described as critical pathways for skill development, credential recognition, and socio-economic mobility. Participants felt that these funding cuts increase exclusion and make it more difficult for newcomers to connect with their communities and take part in society.

Forum attendees emphasized that language barriers, limited understanding of Canadian systems, and employer bias shape nearly all aspects of settlement, influencing newcomers' ability to secure housing, access employment, and navigate services. Participants underscored how limited language proficiency and unfamiliarity with housing rights, employment rights, and system navigation act as constraints in accessing work and housing simultaneously.

1.3. Housing and Well-Being

Housing emerged during the panel as a central determinant affecting newcomers' overall well-being, including their physical and mental health. Throughout discussions, panelists emphasized housing affordability as a major challenge to securing housing that is both stable and suitable for their needs. They also pointed out that structural

barriers, stigma, and discrimination within the housing system may create limiting and unstable housing conditions that disproportionately affect newcomer families and youth. Participants highlighted the limited availability of social and subsidized housing, noting that long waitlists often extend beyond the period when newcomers need housing the most.

According to the panelists, housing instability was not an isolated issue, but one deeply interconnected with employment insecurity, income inadequacy, and limited access to language training. Panelists said that restricted access to employment and language supports directly reduces housing security, while housing instability in turn undermines efforts to pursue work, education, and community participation. These intertwined pressures place significant strain on newcomers and immigrant families' physical and mental health well-being.

An urgent challenge facing newcomers, rising housing costs, combined with low or unstable incomes, force families and individuals into overcrowded or unsuitable living conditions. Furthermore, table discussions highlighted how landlord documentation requirements such as employment letters, proof of income, credit history, or guarantors further restrict access to housing, particularly for newcomers in precarious employment or early stages of settlement.

1.4. Isolation and 'Belonging'

Panelists reflected on a notable tension within the survey findings: despite facing significant income inadequacy, employment barriers, and social isolation, survey participants overwhelmingly felt a strong sense of belonging in Hamilton. Panelists interpreted it as evidence of community resilience and the presence of supportive relationships, particularly within peer networks and community spaces. At the same time, panelists acknowledged that feelings of belonging necessitate opportunities to meet material needs related to housing, employment, language access, and education.

Panelists noted that limited access to stable employment, suitable housing, and education restricts opportunities for participation in community life, while discrimination and exclusion in public and institutional spaces further deepen feelings of disconnection.

Rising anti-immigrant sentiments, shifts in immigration policy, and cuts to settlement services have contributed to increased experiences of discrimination and exclusion among newcomers. Panelists noted that recent public debates about immigration have scapegoated immigrants and international students for strains on public services and housing. According to the panelists, these narratives affect everyday experiences of safety and participation for newcomers, including their ability to secure housing,

employment, and engage confidently in public spaces. Furthermore, panelists emphasized the importance of collaborative responses that educate and integrate mental health supports within settlement, education, and employment services to create a more sustainable settlement landscape.

1.5. Transportation

Participants also highlighted additional navigational constraints that intensify everyday pressures during early settlement. They identified transportation barriers, including reliance on limited public transit and the absence of a driver's license, as restricting access to employment, education, and essential services. Participants said many job postings require a valid drivers' license, which can effectively exclude individuals who depend on public transit.

Attendees also highlighted how transit systems and payment requirements embed accessibility barriers, particularly for individuals with limited digital literacy or those experiencing language barriers or housing instability. These compounding barriers can limit mobility, narrow employment access, and intensify the time and financial cost associated with navigating daily life in the city.

2. Cyclical Barriers and Uneven Pathways to Settlement

Across table discussions, participants repeatedly described settlement as a process shaped by circular and compounding barriers rather than linear pathways. Many articulated a “can’t get this unless you have that” reality, in which participation in the labour market is contingent on ‘legal’ status, work permits, language proficiency, ‘Canadian work experience,’ and housing access. Participants also said that access to housing is highly dependent on proof of employment and stable income, while stable housing itself is a prerequisite for pursuing work, education, or language training. According to participants, these interdependencies can be particularly constraining during early settlement, creating conditions that impact socio-economic, personal, and familial well-being.

Figure 1. Conceptual illustration of interconnected and cyclical domains shaping newcomers’ settlement experiences, as identified through table discussions. The figure highlights status, income, housing, employment, language access, and education are interwoven.



As illustrated in Figure 1, settlement was not discussed as a linear progression nor predictable causality, but as a set of **interconnected conditions** that shape and constrain one another:

- Access to status, study or work permits, housing, employment, language education, and income are mutually dependent, often producing circular barriers subject to change.
- These conditions are experienced unevenly, shaped by factors such as age, gender, race, reasons for migrating, acquired education, and income levels, among others.
- Within this landscape, however, non-material dimensions, such as safety, belonging, dignity, physical health and mental well-being are inseparable from material conditions, influencing how immigrants across settlement pathways navigate settlement within complex, conditional, and constraining institutional systems.

Table discussions further underscored that cyclical settlement barriers are experienced **across family systems and life stages**, with distinct implications for children and youth. For newcomer families, housing instability and income precarity were described as having direct consequences for children's and youth's well-being. Participants described how immigrant families often rely on one another to navigate complex socio-legal and institutional systems. These intergenerational dynamics highlight newcomer resilience as well as the need for systems to better recognize and support holistic family-oriented forms of settlement.

Participants also illustrated these cyclical dynamics through specific experiences shared during table discussions. To highlight, **Francophone service providers and Francophone newcomers** explicitly described arriving in Ontario with expectations shaped by Canada's official bilingualism and public messaging promoting opportunities for French-speaking individuals. Testimonies underscored that, in practice, Francophone residents encounter limited employment opportunities and limited French-language service availability due to insufficient institutional capacity and limited bilingual staffing. Similar concerns also appeared in the Hamilton Immigrant Survey 2025 open-ended responses, explicitly highlighting a disconnect between policy and lived experiences.

“As a welcoming city of the French-speaking world, to ensure jobs for French speakers with an average level of English. We chose Hamilton believing that we can find employment in French while waiting for our speaking skills to improve, but unfortunately this is not the case.”

– Hamilton Immigrant Survey 2025 participant

During table discussions, similar dynamics were described by participants supporting **Ukrainian newcomers**, particularly individuals arriving under temporary protection pathways. Participants noted that Ukrainian newcomers have been cut off from language training classes which, combined with financial constraints and eligibility restrictions to settlement services, has resulted in heightened isolation and distancing from the broader community.

“Ukrainians cut off from LINC, only reached CLB 4, don’t have opportunity to go to school for free, can’t pay for other options; don’t speak the language, no opportunities to learn.”

– **Community Forum Table Discussion participant**

Table discussions brought forward how **immigration status** intensifies cyclical settlement barriers. Attendees emphasized that international students and asylum seekers undergoing refugee determination processes encounter multilayered barriers due to ineligibility to access some social, education, employment, and housing services.

International students were frequently referenced as facing particularly acute pressures. Service providers and individuals with lived experiences said rising housing costs and limited access to stable employment intersect with restrictions tied to temporary status. Discussions emphasized limited work hours, employer reluctance to hire non-permanent residents, and barriers to affordable housing place many temporary migrants and international students in precarious living and working conditions. These constraints can contribute to feelings of isolation, financial stress, and restricted participation in civic community life.

Refugee claimants were also identified as facing restricted pathways to accessing post-secondary education, work permits, and professional training while awaiting ‘legal’ status determination processes. Participants noted that extended uncertainty around status and permit processing often disrupt educational and employment continuity for refugee claimants, intensifying financial strain and reinforcing other settlement barriers.

3. The Role of Settlement Supports

Table discussions highlighted the critical role that settlement agencies and community-based organizations play in supporting newcomers as they navigate a seemingly fragmented and shifting service landscape. Participants described **cross-sector collaborations** as a reality emerging through referral networks and the creation of partnerships.

Participants shared examples of active **partnership-building** across newcomer-serving organizations, ethnocultural associations, and grassroots organizations. These relationships were described as especially important for reaching individuals who may not access formal settlement services due to eligibility restrictions, language barriers, or mistrust of institutions. Community-based organizations such as **ethnocultural and faith-based organizations** were described as trusted entry points for newcomers, fostering connections while serving as a critical role in bridging individuals to broader service systems.

At the same time, participants underscored that these collaborative efforts operate within significant structural constraints. Participants noted ongoing efforts to expand multilingual resources and tailor supports for individuals with various immigration pathways and 'legal' statuses, while acknowledging that **funding limitations** continue to restrict program scope, staffing capacity, and long-term support. Similarly, table discussions shared that limited access to clear, accessible, and timely information about available services and system navigation further compound settlement barriers. Attendees noted that while frontline workers and community organizations work diligently to provide guidance and foster belonging, inconsistent communication across systems and changing eligibility frameworks make it difficult to ensure **equitable access to information**.

These reflections across table discussions highlight the strengths of the current settlement service network as well as the strains it experiences. While cross-sector partnerships exist as the backbone of settlement support, participants emphasized the need to better recognize, resource, and coordinate these efforts.

Table 1 builds on these discussions by identifying existing community assets perceived as contributing to the support of newcomers' settlement journeys and well-being.

Table 1. Assets Identified Under Each Settlement Area

Settlement Area	Assets Identified
Service Providers	Diversified staffing across organizations; inclusion-focused hiring practices; staff with lived experience of migration supporting trust-building and navigation.
Community-based & Ethnocultural Spaces	Ethnocultural associations and faith-based groups as trusted anchors; grassroots and volunteer-led initiatives fostering belonging and peer connection.
Employment	Mentorship program linking employers and newcomers; bridge-to-work initiatives (for example, Early Childhood Educator Bridge to Work); municipal and sector-led workforce summits convening employers, service providers, and public institutions; paid and subsidized training opportunities; short-term certifications (for example, Food Handler's).
Housing	Tenant rights workshops; system navigation support delivered in partnership with housing-focused organizations.
Language Training	Conversation circles embedded within employment services; Language Instruction for Newcomers (LINIC) classes for youth; informal language practice groups supporting comprehension and enhancing connections.
Digital, Financial & Public Access	Public libraries as access hubs; device lending programs (for example, YMCA laptops); digital literacy coaching; budgeting and debt management classes; savings workshops.
Youth & Family Supports	Youth-focused programming (for example, Hamilton Police youth programming); college and community-based initiatives addressing isolation and social connection.
Community Events & Civic Spaces	Community-based events fostering belonging through initiatives promoting inclusion and education, such as Hamilton Newcomer Day.

Towards Strengthening Service Coordination and Collaboration

Discussions throughout the day had common themes of strengthening responses through collaboration. While participants identified persistent settlement challenges, they also highlighted coordination gaps within and across settlement services. These gaps existed particularly for Francophone newcomers, immigrant youth, refugee claimants, individuals with precarious immigration status, and newcomer families.

Pressing Settlement Challenges

Underemployment and constrained labour market mobility were consistently identified as significant settlement pressures. Participants highlighted the need to strengthen pathways into meaningful employment through expanded bridging and training initiatives, more effective credential recognition processes, and sustained employer engagement. According to participants, enhancing structured collaboration between employers and immigrant-serving employment agencies is an important way address long-term unemployment and underemployment among newcomers.

Affordability and housing suitability were described as foundational to newcomers' well-being. Participants emphasized the need for strengthened eviction prevention strategies, expanded tenant education, and increased investment in public and subsidized housing. Similarly, addressing discriminatory landlord practices was identified as pivotal to improving equitable access to stable housing.

Participants consistently identified language training access as foundational to employment, education, housing, and service navigation. Participants called for restoring and expanding language training across various levels, upholding culturally responsive programming through the inclusion of comprehension-based supports and conversation circles. Attendees emphasized the importance of integrating language supports more directly within employment services.

Participants highlighted that collaboration is needed to address compounding isolation and discrimination experiences. Recommendations revolved around integrating mental health supports across the settlement sector, particularly within employment services. Increasing opportunities for civic engagement and strengthening public education initiatives to counter discrimination and xenophobic narratives were also identified as priorities.

Settlement Services and Coordination Gaps

Participants identified the need to enhance coordination across settlement and other social service systems, including the implementation of a one-stop intake and referral model, strengthened cross-agency communication, and improved access to clear, multilingual service information. Attendees noted that communication pathways must extend beyond formal institutional channels, such as through grassroots and ethnocultural organizations, to ensure broader accessibility for newcomers.

Funding stability emerged as a critical structural concern. Attendees emphasized the importance of sustained and flexible funding across the settlement sector to support staffing continuity, program stability, and coordinated service delivery. Participants further emphasized the value of shared programming and inter-agency collaboration to address service gaps associated with funding reductions.

Participants highlighted the need for coordinated advocacy at municipal, provincial, and federal levels. Key areas include aligning social assistance rates with cost-of-living realities, addressing the financial burden associated with immigration-related fees, and improving access to post-secondary education and training for refugee claimants and temporary residents. Participants also emphasized the importance of strengthening preventative and early-intervention approaches.

Simultaneously, attendees underscored how strengthening responsive service deliveries includes partnerships with ethnocultural and faith-based organizations, with deliberate cross-sector, trauma-informed tools.

Areas of Further Research

Participants shared several areas for further research. They included 1) deeper exploration of how newcomers conceptualize 'belonging,' especially how connection, participation, and inclusion are understood within the local context, and 2) how housing suitability shapes newcomers' feelings of 'belonging' and inclusion.

Participants also raised concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of the settlement serving landscape amid ongoing destabilizing funding cuts that significantly pressure organizational capacity, continuity of care, and collaborative infrastructure. Emerging sector research on immigration and funding cuts further highlights the implications of resource reduction for settlement organizations serving immigrants, migrants, and refugees.

Critical Reflections from the Forum

Through sharing lived experiences and on-the-ground knowledge, the Community Forum reaffirmed settlement as relational, non-linear processes shaped by interconnected systems and shared responsibility. Across discussions, participants emphasized collaboration as a necessary response to exclusion, precarity, and uneven access to resources.

Participants discussed that meaningful collaboration requires sustained coordination and investment. Amidst reduced immigration levels and cuts to settlement service funding, forum reflections highlighted the need for aligned action across municipal, provincial, and federal governments to support inclusive, holistic, and dignified settlement pathways. Uncertainty and instability in funding reduces service programming, organizational capacity, and equitable access to support amid growing needs.

Importantly, reflections from the forum underscored the importance of situating settlement work within the contextual realities of Indigenous sovereignty. Forum attendees highlighted the significance of centering Indigenous knowledge and leadership within immigration settlement spaces.

Appendix I. Pressing Challenges and Calls to Action

Pressing Settlement Challenges and Calls to Action	
Underemployment	• Expand paid internships, bridging, and retraining pathways to employment. • Enhance workforce development supports, such as credential recognition pathways, employer education, and rights awareness. • Improve connections with employers through workforce summits and job fairs.
Housing Affordability & Suitability	• Strengthen eviction prevention and tenant education. • Advocate for public subsidized housing. • Address discriminatory landlord practices.
Language Access	• Advocate for expanding access to language training across proficiency levels affected by recent funding cuts. • Uphold culturally sensitive language programming, including comprehension-based supports and conversation circles. • Integrate language supports within employment services.
Isolation & Discrimination	• Integrate mental health supports within all settlement services, especially within the employment sector. • Create ways to increase civic engagement for newcomers. • Promote public education initiatives that counter discrimination and xenophobic narratives.

Settlement System Coordination Gaps and Calls to Action	
Information Access & System Navigation	• Explore a one-stop referral system or coordinated intake models. • Strengthen cross-agency referrals. • Develop clearer, multilingual, and accessible service information. • Develop trusted, accessible communication pathways beyond 'formal' channels (for instance, WhatsApp).
Funding Stability & Service Capacity	• Advocate for sustained and flexible funding across settlement sectors. • Support staffing capacity and long-term programming. • Strengthen programming across agencies to address gaps created by funding cuts.
Policy Advocacy & Structural Change	• Advocate for increased social assistance rates reflecting real cost-of-living pressures. • Raise awareness of high immigration and application-related fees and their impact on families. • Advocate for economic policies that address structural inequalities. • Improve access to post-secondary education and training for refugee claimants and temporary residents.
Community Collaboration & Critical Practices of Care	• Commit to partnerships with ethnocultural and faith-based organizations. • Invest in resourcing cross-sector trauma-informed approaches to practice. • Shift from crisis-based responses toward prevention practices, particularly for newcomers facing prolonged housing instability, underemployment, or legal uncertainty.



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