



Community Planning Forum Report

March 22th, 2024

140 Westmount Road North
CommunityBasedResearch.ca

Waterloo, ON N2L 3G6
Lisa@CommunityBasedResearch.ca



CENTRE FOR
COMMUNITY
BASED RESEARCH

HIPC Community Planning Forum Report

Contents

- Purpose & background..... 3
- Findings..... 4
 - Underemployment 4
 - Housing affordability & suitability 5
 - Social isolation & discrimination 5
 - Healthcare 6
 - Information access & coordination..... 7
 - Youth/students..... 8
 - Refugee claimants 8
 - Francophone newcomers 9
 - Other considerations..... 10
- Next steps 10

Purpose & background

This report is intended to succinctly synthesize data collected through the March 1st, 2024, HIPC community planning forum, “Envisioning Successful Settlement and Belonging for Newcomers in Hamilton”. This event was co-facilitated by HIPC and the Centre for Community Based Research (CCBR). The intention was to engage the broader community in collaboratively determining HIPC’s future priorities.

The event began with a brief review of HIPC’s 2021-2025 strategic plan and 2021-2023 evaluation activities. Evaluation findings to date have pointed to several priority areas or issues experienced by newcomers in Hamilton:

1. Underemployment
2. Housing affordability
3. Social isolation
4. Discrimination (in workplaces, public spaces, housing)
5. Emerging issues (such as the Ukraine humanitarian crisis response)
6. Healthcare (noted as a major challenge in the 2023 Hamilton Immigrant Survey)
7. Cost of living (noted as a major challenge in the 2023 Hamilton Immigrant Survey)

HIPC shared with the forum an overview of these findings and the Council’s corresponding interventions in these areas since 2021. Attendees were then invited to discuss these and other issues and interventions in small groups, to help distill HIPC’s future priorities.

Specifically, participants were given the following instructions:

Step 1. Consider the **issues** identified:

- Discuss, what resonates? What’s a surprise? What’s missing?
- Add to Miro board your top 5 total responses.

Step 2. Consider the **actions** taken:

- Discuss, what new HIPC actions should be started? What HIPC actions should be stopped? What HIPC actions should continue?
- Add to Miro board your top 5 total responses.

The conversations in each group were supported by trained volunteer facilitators who took detailed notes to share with the room (using a projected Miro board). The room was then asked to reflect on the contents of the Miro board, discuss at each table their group’s contribution relative to others, and use an open mic to speak to what they felt was their group’s most important contribution, and/or comment on the board in some other unique way.

To close this collective consideration of participants’ experiences and recommendations, three members of the HIPC leadership team spoke to the room, sharing their thoughts about what they had gained from this community dialogue.

The following summary of priority issues and recommended actions was consequently drawn from three data sources:

- 1) The community forum Miro board, where 12 table discussions were summarized by table facilitators.
- 2) Extended facilitators’ notes from each table.
- 3) CCBR team members’ notes capturing comments from the room of attendees and HIPC leaders as they reflected on the Miro board contents.

CCBR reviewed these three sources, and synthesized the themes and recommendations found therein, for presentation in the findings section of this report. Most of the language below paraphrases the data sources, but occasionally comments have been integrated verbatim. The findings are presented in no particular order and do not reflect evaluation of the merits of community members' contributions.

Findings

This section summarizes the key areas addressed by attendees, the “issues” they brought forward relevant to each area, and the actions they recommend be taken to address those issues.

We have made an effort to align the noted issues and actions in the tables below although there is not always an exact correlation between the left and right columns. **We have also highlighted in orange those issues and actions that were raised repeatedly, by multiple tables, to indicate where there is some evidence of consensus or common concern.**

It should be noted that most of the participant groups indicated that HIPC should maintain all of its current interventions in the identified areas. The actions HIPC has been taking so far are seen to be valuable. In particular, the Hamilton Employers Hire Immigrants campaign, Newcomers Day, the “Redbook” directory of services, and “the housing guide” were recognized by participants as very beneficial resources. Such comments are excluded from the presentation of findings below, to make room for other recommended actions.

Underemployment

| Issues | Potential actions |
|---|---|
| <p>The lack of recognition of foreign credentials and experience continues to be a major barrier.</p> <p>Discrimination is a barrier to gaining Canadian work experience.</p> | <p>Work with employers to reduce bias and promote appreciation of the benefits that newcomers bring to the workplace.</p> <p>Generate more support for newcomer entrepreneurs and connect newcomers with business development services.</p> |
| <p>The cost of retraining is high.</p> <p>Limited access to ESL is a further impediment.</p> <p>The jobs that newcomers do attain are often entry-level, not well-paid, and employees are more vulnerable to mistreatment.</p> <p>Succession planning within organizations and institutions is needed to move more newcomers into leadership roles.</p> <p>Students are not allowed to work part-time while studying.</p> | <p>Advocate to address the cost of retraining.</p> <p>Address long wait times for ESL classes.</p> <p>Ensure HIPC leadership, its staff and its member organizations are representative of newcomers in the community.</p> <p>Create volunteer pathways to people’s chosen professions.</p> <p>Advocate for students to be able to work part-time.</p> <p>Marry information from employers with newcomer survey data.</p> |

Housing affordability & suitability

| Issues | Potential actions |
|--|---|
| <p>Concerns about house affordability and stability is closely related to the concerns about the high cost of living. The cost of housing leaves no resources with which newcomers can meet their other needs.</p> | <p>Create financial education opportunities for newcomers, to help them learn how to avoid scams, advocate for themselves, build their credit rating, know their tenant rights, understand Canadian bank fees, pay cheques, and taxes, etc.</p> |
| <p>The housing crisis is worsening.</p> <p>More research is needed for shelters to determine how to better support newcomers, what new services are required, how many of the guests are women, etc.</p> <p>Shelters are running above capacity and many newcomers are staying in shelters.</p> <p>Newcomers are not always aware of their rights in housing.</p> <p>It is difficult to find a guarantor to secure first accommodation in Canada because newcomers lack a credit history.</p> <p>The size of families also complicates the search for housing.</p> | <p>Work on relationship-building with landlords.</p> <p>Do more research about who is using the shelters and what they need.</p> <p>Consider instituting a campaign like Hamilton Houses Immigrants, or Landlord Awards, to encourage landlords to adopt best practices.</p> <p>Advocate for increased social assistance rates.</p> <p>Advocate for more city-owned affordable housing.</p> <p>Tours within and information about family shelters are incredibly important because they can be a safety net for families who don't have anyone to fall back on.</p> <p>Need more tools/pathways to accessing shelter/housing.</p> |

Social isolation & discrimination

| Issues | Potential actions |
|--|--|
| <p>Connection and belonging are complicated by the intersectionality of identity. Integration and outreach activities, and service design, should account for diversity amongst newcomers. For example, safe spaces must be created for queer newcomers; economic migrants and refugee claimants have different needs and attitudes about using services, etc.</p> | <p>Train frontline workers to better understand cultural differences and intersectional forms of discrimination, and to tailor services to account for the diverse and intersectional identities of newcomers.</p> |

| Issues | Potential actions |
|--|---|
| <p>This is a priority because connection and belonging is the foundation of a person's success in other areas of life.</p> <p>Discrimination creates social isolation. "I felt Canadian once I could be myself."</p> <p>Discrimination often takes the form of microaggressions or is expressed on social media.</p> | <p>Make queer and racialized community networks more immediately visible for newcomers.</p> <p>Promote safe and inviting spaces for community gathering and for access to services.</p> <p>Create an ambassadors' program to help newcomers integrate into existing cultural networks.</p> <p>Create volunteer opportunities to generate belonging.</p> <p>Create a directory of social groups and communities.</p> <p>Offer training workshops for refugee claimants on soft skills and general Canadian life skills.</p> <p>Deepen connections with cultural/community centres/faith groups. Make legal rights and protections more visible to combat discrimination.</p> |

Healthcare

| Issues | Potential actions |
|---|---|
| <p>It is surprising that language is still a barrier to healthcare.</p> | <p>Make interpretation services more widely available.</p> |
| <p>Newcomers need assistance to better understand the healthcare system, and to access general practitioners and mental health.</p> <p>Refugee claimants are paying up front for healthcare (medications and/or services) and cannot access ODSP.</p> <p>Healthcare workers are not aware of the Federal Interim Health Care program, and the program does not provide sufficient coverage.</p> <p>Mental health, need for trauma informed supports, culturally competent and in first language</p> | <p>"Gather more specific information on healthcare. Deeper dive."</p> |

Information access & coordination

| Issues | Potential actions |
|--|--|
| <p>There is an overload of information for newcomers, and insufficient coordination between services, especially when it comes to the communication of information. This should be streamlined through more coordinated services.</p> <p>Access to tech and digital skills can be a barrier to some. It is valuable to provide resources in multiple formats and languages, and at a physical central local, in addition to online.</p> | <p>Update the online directory regularly to make it more reliable, and trusted, and to clarify who is eligible for which services.</p> <p>Coordinated case management is also needed to ensure that newcomers are not just bounced from service to service. Case managers can also help to reach more introverted or vulnerable newcomers.</p> <p>As a central hub, the library has helped to connect people to social services. More promotion of cultural and community centres would be impactful.</p> |
| <p>Tech could be better leveraged to improve access to information and translation/interpretation services.</p> <p>Too often erroneous referrals are happening and there is insufficient follow-up post-referral. Silos and barriers within services and government persist.</p> <p>Newcomers need info on arrival and roadmaps that include many possible options. Not all can advocate for themselves to find and sort the information.</p> <p>In terms of public information, media bias is also a barrier.</p> | <p>Investigate the value of AI for improving access to information and services. Ensure all portals are mobile friendly, and outreach efforts should make use of social media, since most people have cellphones even if they otherwise have limited tech access. WhatsApp groups in multiple languages could provide support, as couple multilingual phone lines.</p> <p>One table noted that the Hamilton Legal Clinic is making an effort to coordinate immigrant services.</p> <p>Share/promote HIPC's actions more widely, for better visibility and engagement. For instance, Newcomer Week could be more visible.</p> <p>Consider who can attend events (e.g. those who need childcare, transportation, etc.) and if decision makers and small community leaders are participating.</p> |

Youth/students

| Issues | Potential actions |
|---|--|
| <p>Youth need more attention and support to integrate. (In part because they support their parents' integration and because parents are often so absorbed in finding housing and work, they may not be involved in children's education.)</p> <p>It's difficult to keep youth in Hamilton because they look for better economic opportunities elsewhere after post-secondary education.</p> | <p>Provide programming in schools to help youth feel welcome and supported to learn what they need to navigate life in Canada, including ESL, but also to help them break out of cultural cliques.</p> <p>Create more social activities for youth to connect with one another.</p> |
| <p>Kids will change their names in school and compromise their identities.</p> <p>Mental health is under strain when youth are living in shelters.</p> <p>International students need support to access Canada Summer Jobs grant and are unable to work part-time.</p> | <p>Survey newcomer youth.</p> <p>(Note: Like refugee claimants, youth/students and others fall into a grey area in terms of status and access to services, for e.g. children of international students, visitors, etc.)</p> |

Refugee claimants

| Issues | Potential actions |
|---|---|
| <p>Refugee claimants are not eligible for many services because of their status, and they typically arrive with fewer material and social resources as compared to permanent residents.</p> <p>(As noted above) Refugees are paying up front for healthcare (medications and/or services) and cannot access ODSP.</p> <p>(Note: Two groups commented that the children of refugee claimants can not attend school. This may indicate that misinformation is being shared, or that public policy ensuring educational access for anyone age 6-18 regardless of status is not being properly implemented, or that the problem is that young adults can not attend school. This is likely a problem for those prior to a claim).</p> | <p>Provide workshops specifically for refugee claimants to help them navigate the refugee claimant process, and to learn life skills in Canada such as how to take a bus, get a library card, access medical care, etc.</p> |

| Issues | Potential actions |
|---|--|
| <p>The number of refugee claimants has dramatically increased in recent years.</p> <p>Service providers are not well trained to support refugee claimants to navigate the system. (Micah House is doing some training.) Refugee claimants are more vulnerable to being exploited by those who falsely claim they can help them.</p> | <p>Add a refugee claimant section to the Redbook directory, which is mainly for permanent residents.</p> <p>Create a toolkit/training for service providers so they can better support refugee claimants with the claims process.</p> <p>Ensure there is foodbank support for refugee claimants.</p> |

Francophone newcomers

| Issues | Potential actions |
|---|---|
| <p>Many issues are exacerbated for Francophone newcomers because of the minority status of the Francophone community.</p> | <p>Align with the French immigration table and otherwise prioritize bilingual integration.</p> |
| <p>Language barriers are more pronounced for Francophones, limiting employment, social connections, access to services, etc. The demand for ESL classes has increased along with wait times.</p> <p>HIPC has not been evolved and present in Francophone activities.</p> <p>There is a lack of Francophone resources, funding, and organizations to promote Francophone connection.</p> <p>There is a lack of awareness of the French services that are available.</p> <p>[Note: Only one table was focused on the discussion of Francophone issues. This does not mean that the input from this table is of less significance. We have given the topic of Francophone issues its own section in this report to reflect the breadth of that discussion at the forum. The highlighted entry articulates the overall argument.]</p> | <p>Expand interpretation services for Francophones.</p> <p>Improve awareness among HIPC members of Francophone organizations and the importance of asking newcomers about their official language preference (English or French) to provide appropriate services.</p> <p>English service providers should promote the visibility of French services and refer newcomers to Francophone organizations.</p> <p>Take concrete actions to collaborate with the Francophone community, especially since Hamilton is designated as a welcoming Francophone community.</p> <p>Raise awareness about the importance of bilingualism (English & French) in Canada.</p> |

Other considerations

A variety of other comments were made once or twice by various tables and are captured in the following list. They are worth noting but since there was limited commentary on these points, they are not treated as priority areas in this report.

1. **Safety:** How safe do newcomers feel in the city? Safety concerns due to hate crimes. Do newcomers feel deceived? For example, they are told that Hamilton is cheaper than Toronto, but it is not much cheaper anymore.
2. **Identification:** Getting personal ID is also a big challenge.
3. **Geopolitical advocacy:** Continue to advocate for other emergent issues and ensure consideration of geopolitical biases.
4. **Food security:** It was noted that this should not be overlooked.

Next steps

This forum was a good starting point in thinking about the next HIPC Community Plan. We were able to gather a good cross-section of the community to identify priorities, which speak to these four intersecting community issues, one operational sector issue, and three priority populations:

| Community issues for all newcomers | Operational issue | Priority populations |
|---|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Underemployment 2. Housing affordability & suitability 3. Social isolation & discrimination 4. Healthcare | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information access & coordination for all newcomer supports | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth/students 2. Refugee claimants 3. Francophones |