



# Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in Medicine Hat, Alberta

This community report is part of the "Immigration Settlement Services and Gaps in CIC's Western Region" study.

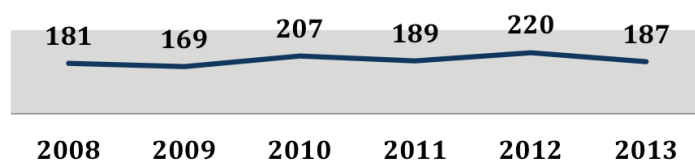


Population (2012): 61,180 residents.

Source: Source: Municipal 2012 Census.

## Permanent Resident Landings Medicine Hat 2008-2013

Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada



UNIVERSITY OF MANITOBA



Data sources: 2 Service Providing Organizations (SPOs) receiving funding from CIC, Provincial and other sources.

- Findings validated locally

## SETTLEMENT SERVICES



### Top services offered

Medicine Hat is home to a historically established and impressive network of settlement services, with all possible services listed (appendix A) being offered by the participant organizations or someone in the community.



### Key gaps identified

- Access to affordable and convenient transportation
- Access to legal services and immigration lawyers
- Opportunities for volunteer contributions
- Access to citizenship testing facilities
- Access to credential upgrading



### Barriers to access services

- English language proficiency
- Poor rates of literacy, especially among refugees
- Costly and inaccessible public transportation; and difficulty accessing the city from nearby communities
- Ineligibility of services



### Top services needed

- Information and orientation
- More accessible mental health services
- Volunteer centre
- Transportation services
- Enhanced / longer term language and literacy programs



### Services needed by newcomers ineligible for CIC funded services

Language assessment and training, job specific language training, information and orientation, assistance finding housing and with daily life, recognition of foreign credentials, legal support and referral.

## PARTNERSHIPS



Medicine Hat has a well-developed and diverse service provider partnership network.

The most commonly identified partnerships exist with umbrella organizations, house services, health services, children/family services, language training providers, business, Francophone organizations, universities/research networks, labour market services and public libraries. Settlement, Integration and welcoming activities were all reported in partnership, but settlement was the least common activity.



## INTEGRATION IN COMMUNITY

The perception among participants is that it is "easy to somewhat easy" for newcomers to settle in the community because of the small size of the community and accessibility of quality settlement services. One participant believed finding employment is "somewhat difficult" for newcomers in the community (due to language barriers and transportation) while the other participant described it as very easy.

# IMMIGRATION SETTLEMENT SERVICES AND GAPS IN CIC'S WESTERN REGION: Medicine Hat, Alberta

## Introduction

The purpose of this project is to better understand the settlement and integration services available to newcomers and to explore the service gaps and opportunities in Medicine Hat, Alberta and 28 other rural communities across Western Canada. This research offers a current snapshot of Medicine Hat by providing information gathered from a sample of local service providers. It is not a comprehensive review of all settlement services in Medicine Hat. Data was collected in October and November 2014 from two organizations that serve newcomers in Medicine Hat through a telephone survey completed by a representative from each organization. The survey was followed by a telephone consultation with 2 participants which allowed them to offer feedback on the initial survey findings. Both organizations received provincial funding, one from CIC, one from a private fund, as well as from other funding sources. The survey respondents participated in a feedback session on the primary survey findings via teleconference held in December 2014.

## Background

Medicine Hat is situated in south east Alberta, Canada. It is approximately 169 km (105 mi) east of Lethbridge and 295 km (183 mi) southeast of Calgary. This city and the adjacent Town of Redcliff to the northwest are surrounded by Cypress Country. The primary employers for newcomers in Medicine Hat are the oil and gas and service industries. Historically, Medicine Hat maintained stable population growth and the community has a diverse population of roughly 61,180. Landings of permanent residents reached its peak point in 2012.

## Community Settlement Concerns

One participant felt that the number of newcomers settling in Medicine Hat had increased in the previous five years, whereas the other believed it had decreased during that same period. Both participants felt that it was somewhat easy for newcomers to integrate into Medicine Hat. The relative ease of this process was attributed to the fairly small size of the community and its excellent existing network of service providers.

As indicated in the follow-up consultation there were some concerns expressed by participants. For example, public transportation was viewed as expensive and inadequate, in terms of meeting the needs of newcomers. Public transportation services are unavailable to some shift workers due to operational hours, and newcomers based in nearby communities such as Redcliff find it difficult to access their place of work in Medicine Hat. Service providers noted the difficulties for working adults to find childcare for infants in the city.

There were also concerns expressed over credential recognition and jobs training / upgrading. Participants noted during the follow-up consultation that newcomers often have to leave the city in order to upgrade their education and skills at a university or technical college; often this results in a loss of skilled workers to major urban centres like Calgary. There were also identified issues with mental health services not providing non-English language services. As the community is a recipient of a significant number of refugees many of these individuals have acute mental health needs and in some instances suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These individuals have often had to seek treatment elsewhere in order to access treatment in their first language. Participants also noted that the naturalization process was challenging for newcomers in Medicine Hat, based on the fact that citizenship testing facilities are not available in the community (the closest is Lethbridge) thus travel can be costly and time consuming for working adults.

In regards to gaining employment, it was viewed as somewhat difficult to very easy for newcomers to find a job in the community. English language proficiency, literacy rates, access to transportation and credential recognition were identified as important barriers to finding employment. During the follow-up consultation the need for improved local access to skills training was identified as a potential solution to newcomer employment challenges.

## Available Settlement Services

Medicine Hat is home to a historically established and impressive network of settlement and integration services, with all services listed (27 key services – see appendix A) being offered by the participant organizations or someone in the community. The top services that were identified by participants as needed by newcomers were information and orientation, language assessment and training, assistance finding housing and a job, and mental health services.

In regards to newcomers who are ineligible for CIC-funded services, participants indicated that temporary foreign workers (TFW), new and returning naturalized citizens, refugee claimants and international students were all in need of settlement services. Language assessment and training, job specific language training, information and orientation, finding housing, assistance with daily life, recognition of foreign credentials, legal supports and referrals were all listed as the services most needed by newcomers who are ineligible for services.

Several barriers to accessing services were identified by participants. In Medicine Hat, key barriers for newcomers are English language proficiency, literacy rates, ineligibility for services, and transportation difficulties.

## Tracking and Planning

All participating service providers reported that their organizations were guided by a strategic plan and that they regularly, either independently or in partnership, assessed the service needs of the newcomers in their community. These needs assessments took a variety of forms (i.e., survey, community mapping, meeting, discussions with clients, focus groups, and client analysis) and were conducted as frequently as every month or every year.

## Specific Capacities

In Medicine Hat, the organizations that participated in the survey had very strong organizational capacity. All organizations felt they had adequate capacity to communicate with stakeholders, to meet reporting requirements, coordinate services among stakeholders, and adequate financial support from government sources to maintain current services. However, organizations identified that they did not have adequate capacity to provide services in both official languages. More capacity will be needed in the future to meet client needs.

## Partnerships

The existing level of partnership among service providers in Medicine Hat is impressive. To date these partnerships have tended to be informal and ad hoc in nature. With many experienced service providers in the city, and a centralized settlement agency, the city demonstrates noteworthy levels of co-ordination and cooperation among SPOs. In short, it is evident that Medicine Hat has a very well developed service provider partnership network. Participants indicated that they were in partnership with all 21 possible community partners listed in the survey (see appendix B). The most commonly reported partners were umbrella organizations, house services, health services, children/family services, language training providers, business, francophone organizations, Universities/research networks, labour market services, churches, and public libraries.

The activities conducted in partnership were categorized into three groups; settlement (e.g., getting jobs and housing, daily functioning), integration (e.g., teaching labour rules and human rights), and welcoming (e.g., orientation to community, civic events). In Medicine Hat, integration and welcoming activities were more likely to be conducted in partnership than settlement activities. Given the level of partnering and number of partnerships that currently exists in Medicine Hat, this community would be a candidate for a LIP.

## Research Team

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## Appendix A – List of Possible Services

### SETTLEMENT

- Greeting upon arrival/initial reception
- Information and orientation
- Needs assessment and referral
- Interpretation services
- Language assessment
- Language training
- Help finding housing
- Help with daily life (e.g., registering for school, getting a bank account)
- Transportation support

### ECONOMIC

- Help finding a job
- Educational upgrading
- Recognition of foreign credentials
- Investment opportunities
- Job-specific language training
- Help setting up a business
- Occupational/business mentorship and networking
- Financial supports

### SOCIAL

- Childcare
- Cultural Events
- Recreational services
- Legal support/referral
- Health Services
- Mental Health Services
- Social inclusion/ integration support
- Services for seniors
- Services for women
- Services for youth

## Appendix B – Possible Organizational Partnerships

1. School/School Boards
2. Umbrella organizations
3. Newcomers (individuals)
4. Housing services
5. Settlement service providers
6. Health services
7. Municipal offices/EDO
8. Civil society groups
9. Francophone organizations
10. Language training providers
11. Children/Family services
12. Businesses
13. Chambers of Commerce
14. Police Force
15. Universities/Research Networks
16. Ethno-cultural groups
17. Religious organizations
18. Public libraries
19. Foundations
20. Labour market services
21. Other: Faith groups