

This issue is an addition to [previous informational resources AMSSA has developed](#) to recognize and identify the unique barriers that impact newcomers with disabilities and their families' ability to settle and integrate into their communities. This info sheet will also be accompanied by the release of an e-learning course on the topic of supporting newcomers with disabilities.

INTRODUCTION

There is a lack of specific, recent, data on newcomer children with disabilities.¹ The 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability Data captures data on all individuals with disabilities and shows that 14.3% of Canadians aged 15 years and older are members of a visible minority with 15.4% being between ages 15 to 34 years (as cited by Statistics Canada, 2019).²

The latest national dataset specifically about children with disabilities in Canada was collected in 2006.¹ According to the 2006 data, 1.7% of children below the age of 4, 4.6% of children between 5 to 14, and 4.6% of the youth population between ages 15 and 19, experienced disability.³ At early ages, disabilities are difficult to diagnose and within school-aged children, several barriers compromise the quality of life of children with disabilities including impact on their education and social participation.³ Nuances reflected in the 2006 data also show that diagnosis and support for disabilities vary across gender and age groups which can be further complicated by factors such as race and status in Canada. For example, "boys are more likely to have a reported disability than girls" within those from a younger age.³ This is in addition to the negative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that advocates for students with disabilities have identified.⁸

Newcomers with disabilities and families of newcomer children with disabilities face several areas of challenge that shape their need for support from the settlement sector, including but not limited to healthcare management, childcare, accessibility and housing, and integration.^{4,3} "Half of youth with a disability require at least one aid, assistive device, or educational accommodation" and between 42%- 62% have experienced bullying at school depending on the severity of their condition.⁵

CHALLENGES OF NEWCOMER CHILDREN LIVING WITH DISABILITIES

Challenges with Isolation and Barriers to Settlement and Integration

- Newcomer children and youth living with disabilities are more exposed to poverty, which can contribute to social exclusion and living in communities with lower social capital as well as living in poor housing environments.¹
- Children with disabilities who are also members of marginalized groups within Canadian society including racialized and newcomer families, experience discrimination and marginalization in multiple layers. They are exposed to significant inequalities in terms of access to healthcare, social services and education.⁵ Children with disabilities experience limitation in terms of participation in society and are at risk of lower educational attainment and unemployment.¹
- Children with disabilities have less access to opportunities for leisure activities and outdoor physical/free-play activities in comparison to other children.¹ In the 2006 national survey of disability, many parents of younger children with disabilities reported that "their children experience disadvantages in the home or while playing as the result of their disability".³ Children with physical disabilities experience accessibility challenges when going to leisure activities and other get-togethers in public places.⁶ This leads to disappointment and isolation. This impacts the whole family as they cannot simply leave their child at home and go to their family and friends.⁶
- Children living with disabilities face challenges with accessibility in getting to places that are not accessibility friendly.⁶
- Children and youth with disabilities need educational accommodations such as "technological tools with specialized software or adaptation," modified or adapted course curriculum," "Individualized Education Plan (IEP)," and "extended time to take tests and exams".⁵



[1] Shikako-Thomas, K., Gonzalez, M., Lai, J., Movahed, M., Mora Severino, S., Martens, R., Finlay, B., & Zwicker, J. (2020). Children with disabilities in Canada: Alternative Report for the 5th/6th Review of Canada Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Participation and Knowledge Translation in Childhood Disability lab. <https://www.childhooddisability.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/AlternativeREPORT.pdf>

[2] Government of Canada, S. C. (2020, December 3). The Visible Minority Population with a Disability in Canada: Employment and Education. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2020086-eng.htm>

[3] Canada, E. and S. D. (2013, May 22). Disability in Canada: A 2006 Profile [Policies]. <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/disability/arc/disability-2006.html>

[4] Khanlou, N., Haque, N., Mustafa, N., Vazquez, L. M., Mantini, A., & Weiss, J. (2017). Access Barriers to Services by Immigrant Mothers of Children with Autism in Canada. International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction, 15(2), 239–259. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11469-017-9732-4>

[5] Government of Canada, S. C. (2019, September 10). Educational experiences of youth with disabilities. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2019049-eng.htm>

[6] Derived from consultations with Service Provider Organizations working with newcomers with disabilities.

Challenges with Childcare for Families of Newcomer Children Living with Disabilities

Managing child supervision and childcare while making appointments, receiving support and accessing services. This is especially challenging for single headed newcomer families with more than one minor children. Families of newcomer children with disabilities may not be informed about the available resources for their children such as disability tax credits and Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) benefits.⁶ The cultural shock and the language barriers prevent them from getting the right help and resources for their needs.⁶

Diagnosis and reporting of disability has been indicated as important in several sources in the journey of children with disabilities and their families and this process can be impacted by factors such as culture, families' English skills levels, and familiarity to navigate the Canadian system.^{7, 6}

In some cultures, disabilities are not discussed and shared openly due to fear of stigma.⁶ Families might discourage their children to participate in outdoor activities with this belief and not send their child with a disability to attend school even. Fear of stigma may also discourage families from seeking or accepting early screening for developmental delays. Receiving early supports for developmental delays positively impacts school readiness.⁶

- Newcomers' approach towards disability, whether to seek help, treatment options, relationship with health care professionals, early screening for developmental disabilities may be shaped by their cultural attitude towards disability.⁸ Cultural attitudes also influence parents' expectations of and for their child. Cultural beliefs can result in inefficiency and/or tensions between Western service delivery models and cultural traditions. Newcomer families that have a social support system with family and friends "are less likely to seek professional help." This is while social support has been recorded as facilitating positive outcomes for parents and children with higher health care and well being needs.⁴
- Some of the other challenges that have been identified in existing research on experiences of families of children living with disabilities include: ongoing fatigue, emotional stress due to concerns about their children's education, health and wellbeing.⁴ Previous research tells us that "mothers of children with disabilities experience higher rates of poor physical and mental health".⁴ Caregivers experience impact on their mental health as the result of long or unexpected wait times for services.⁶

- Families of children with disabilities have also identified challenges with navigating the system after the COVID-19 pandemic to get their children to school which may adversely impact their financial support funding.⁹
- Families of newcomer children have no or little knowledge of the accessible places for their children's outdoor activities.⁶

Challenges with Health Care Management

Communication, information accessibility, appointment management

- Newcomer parents may not be familiar with the publicly funded support available for children with disabilities or may not qualify for receiving the federally and provincially funded support. This is an addition to the reassurance some newcomer parents would need that "special education support is provided to children in schools at no cost or that a child with disability is still able to attend school."¹⁰ Other factors such as availability of child health and children's disability programs services in family's home language can also implicate access to available services.
- The 2006 national survey reported that for parents who did place their young children in childcare or were in the process of, 13.3% reported that their children were refused because of their disability or were accepted with less than preferred arrangements.³
- Language barriers, limited financial ability, ability to navigate services and limitations with transportation are among the common barriers newcomer families face in accessing health and social services in Canada.⁷
- Impact of children's disability on families have also been noted in terms of parent's having to alter their employment situation to accommodate the increased need for care and support.³
- Long wait times to see the medical specialist keep newcomers with disabilities' benefits pending as they do not have the right diagnosis.⁶

[7] King, G., Lindsay, S., Klassen, A., Esses, V., & Mesterman, R. (2011). Barriers to Health Service Utilization by Immigrant Families Raising a Disabled Child: Unmet Needs and the Role of Discrimination.

[8] Caring for Kids New to Canada—Developmental Disability Across Cultures. (n.d.). Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://kidsnewtocanada.ca/mental-health/developmental-disability>.

[9] News, J. W. · C. (2020, September 5). Families, advocates of students with disabilities seek clarity in school reopening plans | CBC News. CBC. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/schools-reopen-students-special-needs-1.5711493>

[10] Caring for Kids New to Canada—School and Education. (n.d.). Retrieved February 17, 2023, from <https://kidsnewtocanada.ca/mental-health/school>