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Policy Brief

Enhancing Newcomer Research and Knowledge Mobilization Through a Community-Based Knowledge Engagement Hub

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Abstract: As immigration to Canada increases, the complexities associated with serving newcomers (immigrants, refugees, temporary foreign workers, and international students) of diverse ethnogeographical backgrounds also increase. A range of stakeholder groups including researchers, policy makers, immigrant service provider organizations, and newcomer grassroots community organizations aim to help ease the process of settlement and integration for newcomers. A community-based knowledge engagement hub, which has been previously applied in the Indigenous community context, can facilitate the reciprocal flow of knowledge between those involved in newcomer settlement and inform newcomer-centered practice, policy, and research on settlement issues.

Keywords: knowledge engagement, community-based, integrated knowledge translation, immigrant community, newcomers, knowledge hub

Impact and Implications. The establishment of a community-based knowledge engagement hub can better address newcomer settlement issues and be beneficial for all stakeholders involved. As described in 2030 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 10, 16, and 17, inclusive and representative multi-stakeholder partnerships facilitate the mobilization and sharing of knowledge. In turn, shared knowledge can support the implementation of planned and well-managed systems and policies for newcomers.

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Newcomers as a Part of the Canadian Mosaic

Newcomers, including immigrants, refugees, temporary foreign workers, and international students, are the primary drivers of Canada's population growth (Statistics Canada, 2019). Over six million immigrants have arrived in Canada since 1990, with 323,192 admitted in 2019 alone (Statistics Canada, 2019). Consequently, immigrants make up nearly a quarter of the country's total population (Statistics Canada, 2019). The ethnogeographical backgrounds of newcomers to Canada have diversified since the late 1900s and are expected to further diversify in the coming years (Statistics Canada, 2019). Differences in cultural practices that arise from different ethnogeographical backgrounds have been found to influence the settlement needs of newcomers, including social care, education, employment, and health (Ahmed et al., 2016; Chowdhury et al., 2021; Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Simich et al., 2005).

Stakeholders Working on Newcomer Issues

A range of stakeholder groups, such as academic researchers, think tanks, governmental and nongovernmental policy makers, immigrant service provider organizations (SPOs), and newcomer grassroots community organizations, work to address the settlement needs of newcomers in Canada

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(Neudorf, 2016; Turin et al., 2022). Academic researchers and think tanks generate important knowledge about how to best serve newcomers, and policy makers create policies for settlement. SPOs and grassroots community organizations work directly with newcomers to develop appropriate interventions to mitigate settlement barriers and are often newcomers' first line of contact. Besides offering supports such as language training and job placement services, SPOs also help newcomers overcome barriers to experiencing a sense of belonging within Canadian society (Salami et al., 2019). SPOs and grassroots community organizations provide avenues for newcomers to connect to those from similar cultural backgrounds and therefore compensate for the lack of cultural diversity in mainstream community organizations (Salami et al., 2019). The development of cultural connections in turn helps ease the process of creating a sense of belonging within the mainstream society for newcomers (Salami et al., 2019). Although researchers, policy makers, SPOs, and grassroots community organizations play unique roles in addressing the settlement needs of newcomers in Canada, there is a lack of collaboration between these stakeholders in efforts aimed at addressing newcomer issues.

The Need for Cross-Sectoral Knowledge Engagement Among Stakeholders

The University of Calgary defines *knowledge engagement* as "a dynamic and reciprocal process in which multiple stakeholders (including diverse groups such as corporations, community organizations, health and social service providers, academics, policy and decision makers, government, and public at large) come together to address mutually identified problems. The purpose of this deliberate engagement is for the cocreation, synthesis and application of knowledge and evidence to benefit the community at large." Knowledge engagement, similar to some definitions of community engagement, knowledge exchange, and integrated knowledge translation, participatory action research, involves the collaboration of community members and/or organizations from the outset (Campbell, 2010; Simon Fraser University, 2020; Turin et al., 2021a, 2021b; World Health Organization [WHO], 2016). Alternatively, knowledge mobilization and knowledge translation focus on making relevant research outputs accessible and available to the community (Campbell, 2010; WHO, 2016). Implementation science studies the practice of using a new policy or intervention in real-life settings and the contextual factors that may affect its use. In essence, knowledge engagement may generate knowledge that knowledge mobilization may translate, and implementation science may put into practice (Campbell, 2010).

Attempts have been made to link knowledge engagement, knowledge mobilization, and implementation science in the past (Campbell, 2010; Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre, 2005). Knowledge engagement approach informs knowledge mobilization or dissemination activities, and implementation science initiatives regarding putting knowledge into practice (Ellison, 2014). To illustrate, diabetes was reported as a more prevalent disease among South Asians (Lau, 2010), and hypertension was more prevalent among Chinese immigrants (Zou et al., 2017). A health promotion program for both of these communities would need different approaches based on their culture and diet. Without involving these communities in the knowledge engagement process, a conventional one-size-fits-all health promotion program would not work across the communities. It is hence crucial for all relevant stakeholders to be engaged at all stages of knowledge engagement initiatives and for these initiatives to be centered around the relevant community. A cross-sectoral focus on knowledge engagement remains limited in the existing literature. Knowledge engagement efforts have tended to unidirectionally involve researchers and community members or researchers and organizations. In many cases, researchers are the ones guiding the work and telling the communities what needs to be done. This can devalue the cultural knowledge and context of the community (Ellison, 2014). Ensuring that research equally benefits the community requires centrally and reciprocally engaging the community from the outset (Ellison, 2014; Turin et al. 2021a) and promoting precision population health that includes population-tailored health services and programs, population-driven research priorities, and population-controlled research and health data management (Lyles et al., 2018).

Past Knowledge Engagement Efforts

In the past, there have been a few cross-sectoral knowledge engagement efforts where the community is centrally and reciprocally engaged. One example in a different population context is Tabobondung et al.'s (2018) Indigenous Knowledge Network (IKN) for Infant, Child, and Family Health. The IKN was a 5-year community-based action research effort focused on the development and implementation of a knowledge network to enhance First Nations, Métis, and urban Indigenous infant, child, and family health in Ontario and Saskatchewan. For the first two years of the IKN, researchers and Indigenous community health providers gathered knowledge from Indigenous elders and knowledge keepers. For the second 2 years, the IKN implemented culture-based parenting and infant/toddler health promotion programs that drew on the Indigenous knowledge they had

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collected. For example, the Traditional Baby Album program provided parents with traditional teachings and a unique space to record their children's culturally informed, developmental milestones such as *burying the placenta* and *naming ceremony*. Evaluation of the IKN revealed very positive impacts for all stakeholders involved. Notably, the IKN supported the acquisition, interpretation, and application of both community-based Indigenous knowledge and Western public health knowledge by First Nations and Métis community members. Positive relationships were fostered between Indigenous communities and mainstream health research practices, and community members had the opportunity to present their research at local, national, and international meetings.

Although the IKN mainly only involved researchers and community members in the knowledge engagement process, its successes evidence the importance of collaboration between stakeholders, with the community at the center, to address mutually identified problems. The lessons learned in the development and implementation of the IKN are informative for cross-sectoral knowledge engagement initiatives with the newcomer community.

Policy Recommendation

Community-Based Knowledge Engagement Hub

It is recommended that a community-based knowledge engagement hub be established to facilitate reciprocal knowledge engagement across the cross-sectoral stakeholders in newcomer settlement. Examples include researchers, policy makers, and SPOs, all centered around newcomer grassroots community organizations. The establishment of a community-based knowledge engagement hub is recommended to be led by researchers in collaboration with policy makers, SPOs, and the community. Centrally involving grassroots community organizations is important; grassroots communities have first-hand experience as newcomers and are thus best positioned to contribute culturally relevant knowledge to research and to the development of information, priorities, and programs that solve settlement issues.

It is also recommended that a community-based knowledge engagement hub has three focus areas: (1) facilitate a community of practice, (2) support community-based knowledge creation capacity, and (3) support knowledge mobilization capacity (Figure 1). A community of practice refers to groups of people who genuinely care about the same issue and who on that basis interact regularly to learn together and from each other (Wenger, 2010).

Impacts and Implications

Establishing a community-based knowledge engagement hub can facilitate multidirectional knowledge sharing and have high returns on investment for all stakeholders

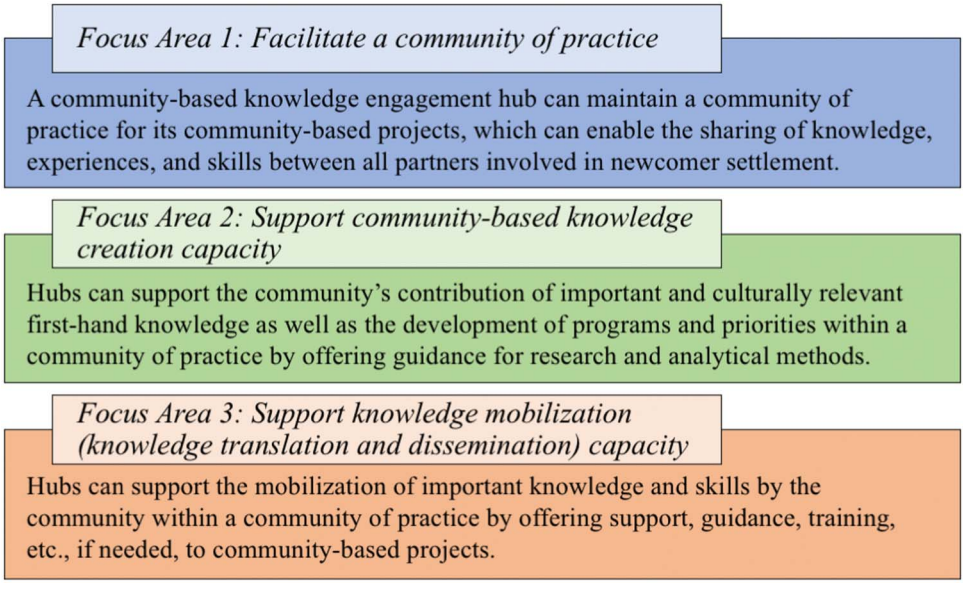

Figure 1. Focus areas of a community-based knowledge engagement hub.

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involved, including researchers, policy makers, SPOs, newcomer grassroots community organizations, and Canadian society. Figure 2 below summarizes the specific expected benefits for stakeholders.

Conclusion

As newcomers to Canada increase and diversify, stakeholders involved in addressing newcomer settlement issues need to

Figure 2. Impacts and implications of community-based knowledge engagement hub.

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collaborate and share their knowledge to successfully solve newcomer issues. It is recommended that a community-based knowledge engagement hub, which involves the cross-sectoral engagement of stakeholders while being centered around the community, be implemented to better address newcomer settlement issues. Similar knowledge engagement efforts in a different population context have been successful in the past and indicate that a community-based knowledge engagement hub can facilitate culturally informed, multidirectional knowledge exchange about solutions to newcomer issues and ultimately have benefits for all those involved.

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