

Immigration in Canada Experiences of Immigrants with Disabilities

The “Excessive Demands” Provision

Due to the long term health care and social service costs associated with accepting immigrant who have disabilities, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) may reject applications using what is known as the “Excessive Demands” provision. Many feel that this law, and its practice, are discriminatory against people with disabilities, and do not meet the equality standards within our Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Because the definition of “excessive” is undefined, each individual applicant is subject to the knowledge and personal biases of their CIC approved medical practitioner who makes this determination.^{1,2}

Barriers to Accessing Services

Without permanent resident status, individuals with temporary status are not eligible for various health and social services without incurring fees for them. Additionally, these individuals may be facing serious financial struggles which are exasperated by the extremely high cost of their varying needs.

Some service providers display a lack of awareness regarding the needs of immigrants who have disabilities. This may even extend into

¹ <http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/immigration>

² http://www.bccpd.bc.ca/docs/legalchange_stevenhawking.pdf?LanguageID=EN-US



organizations that have a strong knowledge of immigration and settlement needs, but falls short in terms of working respectfully with people who have disabilities. This scenario also happens in reverse where an organization may have expertise working with individuals who have disabilities, but are unfamiliar with how to work with the cultural differences that play a role.

Mobility and employment challenges are also major barriers in individuals' access to services, as well as opportunities for improving their circumstances.^{1,3} Occasionally, a lack of awareness regarding available services may be creating barriers for individuals and their families. Raising awareness about available health care services is also a critical for ensuring access.⁴ This supports our community in being well connected to one another, and the services available to us.

³ <http://www.erdco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/ERDCO-PRS-Submission.pdf>

⁴ <http://atlantic.p2pcanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/families-with-disabled-child-final-report.pdf>

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Experiences of Isolation

Immigrant individuals who have disabilities may have disproportionate experiences of isolation. Many individuals fear double discrimination: they are afraid to identify themselves as having a disability in addition to their already stigmatized immigrant status. Additionally, this experience can be made worse because these individuals are not always aware of others who are in similar circumstances. These feelings of isolation can limit them from settling successfully into our community and because they are aware that service providers are not well equipped to meet their needs, immigrants with disabilities may not be accessing available support services.¹

Intersecting Identities

Similar to the experience of “double discrimination” described above, there are a variety of other identities that can add extra layers of discrimination to an individual’s life. This may include gender, country of origin, sexual orientation, visible minority status, income level, religion, and/or age. Each of these layers within a person’s identity can have a positive or negative impact on that person within Canadian society based on our country’s cultural norms.¹ It is important for us to be and remain respectful of each person’s differences, and to understand how differences may be creating disproportionate barriers in a person’s journey to integrate into our community. By engaging these individuals, and building relationships with them, we create a stronger and more inclusive community.^{4,5}

⁵ <http://www.erdco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/ERDCO-PRS-Submission.pdf>



Services Available in Kamloops

Kamloops Immigrant Services (KIS) provides added support to individuals who require more sensitive and/or advocacy support.

The Interior Health Authority provides support for individuals who are faced with mental health challenges through a multicultural counsellor.

People in Motion provide a range of services generally to people who have disabilities. Some of these include day-to-day delivery programs, transportation services, workshops, and connection to the community.⁶

Some of the other organizations that KIS regularly refers to and works with include: ASK Wellness, the Kamloops Brain Injury Association, Open Door Group, Kamloops Sexual Assault Counselling Centre, Kamloops and District Elizabeth Fry Society, and Encore (formerly Seniors Outreach Society).

For more information, please contact:

Kamloops Immigrant Services

448 Tranquille Rd. Kamloops, BC

Ph: 778-470-6101

Email: kis@immigrantservices.ca

⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/PeopleInMotion/info>