

**OCASI-PSI LGBTQ2 Action Plan — Online Submission
May 31, 2021**

7. Which key policy issues and related solutions would your organization like to see included in a federal LGBTQ2 Action Plan, and please explain why? Provide up to five:

Issue #1: LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Settlement Services

Assessment of immigrant and refugee serving organizations indicates that the majority of organizations have poor inclusion and support for LGBTQIA+ immigrants.¹ Even the few organizations that have LGBTQIA+ specific programs operate from a dominant Western heteronormative framework, which erases racialized LGBTQIA+ refugees and immigrants' experiences, particularly from the Global South, and overlook their specific needs.² Furthermore, there are no clear, measurable outcomes, and mechanisms to monitor long term impact and effectiveness of existing LGBTQIA+ inclusive services and supports offered by these organizations. Personal and organizational bias and prejudice within systems and agencies serving immigrants, refugees, and newcomers impact programming and access to services. There are no robust accountability measures built into systems and organization-wide policies to ensure progress in developing LGBTQIA+ inclusive spaces and programming. While limited funding is a concern, the conditions attached to funding, such as the types of programs that can be offered, restrictive eligibility and funding criteria, impede development, implementation, and stability of responsive programs and supports.³ LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees need more time to build trust while working with service providers, and more flexibility in the length of time that they receive services, as they face far more systemic barriers to settlement. However, the current funding model compels agencies to serve a certain number of 'new' (not repeat) clients, limiting the time they can spend in working with LGBTQIA+ clients, who may need more time than most clients. Underfunding and the limitations imposed by funders directly impact LGBTQIA+ newcomers' health, well being, and successful integration.⁴

Recommendation #1: Funders must invest in settlement services, supports and programming that are LGBTQIA+ inclusive, developed by an intersectional lens, and

¹ Giwa and Chaze, 2018 (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10538720.2018.1463889>)

² Ibid; Kulatilake, 2020

(<https://carfms.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Ranjith-P.-Kulatilake-LGBTQ-Newcomer-Resettlement-Final-Version.pdf>)

³ Mukhtar et. al, 2016 (<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12134-015-0421-5>)

⁴ t Kulatilake (2020)

responsive to the specific needs of the LGBTQIA+ refugees, immigrants, and newcomers across the country.

- Provide increased funding specifically for training, capacity building, and resource development to create LGBTQIA+ positive settlement services & supports, and professional development opportunities.
- Strengthen collaboration between immigrant and refugee serving organizations providing these services, LGBTQIA+ civil organizations, and LGBTQIA+ immigrant and refugee community to develop responsive programming and services addressing the specific needs of the LGBTQIA+ newcomers within an intersectional framework that centers the experiences and voices of the racialized LGBTQIA+ refugees, immigrants, and newcomers.
- Eliminate restrictive eligibility criteria for accessing services and supports regardless of immigration status (i.e. temporary residents, international students, migrant workers, undocumented people, citizens, etc.).
- Amend the IRCC funding model to reduce the pressure immigrant and refugee serving organizations face to lower the number of repeat clients and increase the number of new clients.
- Incorporate a sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC) lens in existing evaluation and outcomes measurement frameworks, and accountability measures to monitor the effectiveness of the inclusive settlement services, and their impact on LGBTQIA+ newcomers.

Issue #2: Access to identity documents, health care, and other settlement supports

LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees, particularly trans and non-binary refugees face several barriers in accessing identity documents that reflect their gender identity and name change, including high cost associated with applying for new IDs, challenges with obtaining birth certificates from countries of origin, etc. The process is expensive and unreasonably long. Its impact is discriminatory and oppressive. It impedes LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees' ability to access services and create serious issues in their encounters with police and law enforcement.

The Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP) that provides temporary health-care benefits to resettled refugees, refugee claimants, and other protected persons, does not cover costs for gender affirming surgeries or hormone therapy. In some provinces, such as BC, refugee claimants can have access to provincial health insurance, which covers gender affirming treatments, 3 months after their arrival. However, in others, such as

Ontario, they don't have access to provincial health insurance unless their claim is finalized and /or they have full time work.

Even though many LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees use shelters, safety is an ongoing concern as there are few or sometimes no provisions that address homophobia and transphobia in the shelter system.

Recommendation #2: Remove barriers to accessing identity documents, health care, safe shelter, and other settlement supports, regardless of the arrival pathways and immigration status of LGBTQIA+ immigrants, refugees, and newcomers.

- Uphold the right to gender identity for trans and non-binary refugees and immigrants across the arrival pathways and immigration status.
- Consult and work with organizations that operate Gender ID clinics and support trans and non-binary immigrants to remove the barriers in accessing ID's with correct name and gender designation.
- Invest in resources for skills training in immigrant and refugee serving sector to support trans and non-binary refugees with their ID documents. This training needs to be ongoing to keep up-to-date on new and emerging changes.
- Work with provinces to address inequities in accessing healthcare based on immigration status and region, and extend the coverage of IFHP.
- Work with provinces to address inequities in accessing settlement services based on status, SOGIESC, and location. All LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees should have access to shelter, legal aid, language and employment, and other settlement services, regardless of location and immigration status.

Issue #3: Access to mental health support

Many LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees experience homophobia, transphobia, racism and severe forms of persecution (e.g. arrest, rape, detention, death threats) as a result of their sexual and gender identities. These experiences push LGBTQIA+ people to seek resettlement in countries such as Canada due to the perceived sense of safety Canada grants. However, as LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees seek safer pathways to refuge, the adjudication process to claim asylum or refugee status is riddled with heteronormative structures and biases as well as a burden of proof that can further extend the stress and trauma they experience. Finally, the post-migration landscape is oftentimes not what LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees expect, and the experience of settlement contains continued trauma including homophobia, transphobia, and racism when seeking housing and employment as well as barriers to accessing health care and other services & supports. Research indicates that the impact of these factors on the

mental health of LGBTQIA+ newcomers, particularly asylum seekers, refugee claimants and refugees is significant⁵.

There is a need to provide expanded mental health support to LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees that acknowledges the intersectionality of their experiences across the migration journey and into resettlement. Mental health supports must also be inclusive and dismantle structural and access barriers. While it is important that mental health support must address mental health concerns (e.g. anxiety, trauma, PTSD), this cannot be done in the place of, or without also addressing the social determinants of mental health. It is difficult for LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees to improve their mental wellbeing when their primary needs have not been addressed. This includes needs such as housing, employment, legal and health support that provide a sense of personal safety and security. Mental health practitioners must be knowledgeable and well versed on how to serve the LGBTQIA+ population, both organizations and governments must be purposeful in creating policies, programs, and services that meet the needs of LGBTQIA+ immigrants, refugees, and newcomers.

Recommendation #3: Expand access to mental health supports that are grounded in a social determinants of health framework that is tailored to the specific needs of LGBTQIA+ immigrants, refugees, and newcomers.

- Remove barriers to accessing mental health services by expanding the pathways and the types of support provided, including extending the mental health coverage by the IFHP.
- Ensure that social determinants of mental health are taken into consideration when providing mental health support by facilitating coordination and collaboration across sectors.

Issue #4: National LGBTQIA+ Francophone Strategy

Immigrants and refugees erroneously believe that Canada is an entirely bilingual country. A number of initiatives at the federal level and in some provinces and territories have been launched to support the vitality of Francophone minority communities through immigration. However, access to culturally appropriate and LGBTQIA+ inclusive Francophone services continue to be limited, particularly within the immigrant and refugee serving sector. LGBTQIA+ Francophone refugees and immigrants do not have access to adequate services, and as a result, are unable to integrate themselves within their community. There is a need to conduct extensive needs assessment and build capacity for Francophone LGBTQIA+ inclusive supports across sectors to ensure that

⁵ Mulé, 2020 (<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/19419899.2021.1913443>)

meaningful French language services are readily available for LGBTQIA+ Francophone immigrants and refugees.

Recommendation #4: Create a robust regional and national LGBTQIA+ Francophone Strategy that addresses the specific needs of Francophone LGBTQIA+ immigrants, refugees, and newcomers.

- Provide targeted funding for French speaking and serving LGBTQIA+ organizations and groups. LGBTQIA+ Francophone community is not homogeneous and has diverse needs. Ensure equitable funding opportunities to agencies and groups that focus on serving racialized LGBTQIA+ Francophones, to meet the contextual needs of Francophone LGBTQIA+ newcomers.
- Work closely with federal and provincial governments to ensure that both national and province-wide LGBTQIA+ support networks are sustained to provide LGBTQIA+ Francophone services. There is a lack of platforms that serve as an information base for LGBTQIA+ Francophones particularly for those who are immigrants and refugees.
- Provide funding for research and needs assessment to identify the specific needs of LGBTQIA+ Francophone communities.
- Support the development of Francophone LGBTQIA+ services and inclusive training. LGBTQIA+ Francophone service users are unable to access services that are culturally inclusive and safe. There is a need for competency training cross-sectorally to ensure that organizations serving Francophone LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees are grounded in Anti-Oppression/Anti-Racism (AO/AR) and social determinants of health frameworks.

Issue #5: Dedicated funding for anti-racism related initiatives

According to research, racialized LGBTQIA+ communities face significantly more complex life stressors than their white counterparts, due to stigma and discrimination⁶. They are underserved and underrepresented in decision making circles to combat disparities in social issues. The existing and emerging needs of racialized LGBTQIA+ community members continue to be under-resourced which has a direct impact on their health and overall wellbeing. Both service providers and other stakeholders express concerns about the responsiveness of current initiatives that do not address intersectional oppressions like Anti-Black Racism, Transphobia, Homophobia, Biphobia, Ableism, and Xenophobia that affect the access to services for racialized LGBTQIA+ immigrants and refugees.

⁶ Arlee et. al, 2019 (<https://journals.healio.com/doi/abs/10.3928/00485713-20190910-02>)

Furthermore, there are growing concerns about the lack of representation of diverse racialized communities within LGBTQIA+ organizations and the lack of disaggregated data on race and issues surrounding SOGIESC. The lack of quantifiable information on racialized LGBTQIA+ immigrant and refugee communities has resulted in programs and services that do not address the existing and emerging needs of the community. As a result, racialized LGBTQIA+ communities have higher percentages of medical issues, including higher rates of HIV and substance use disorders, and face increased rates of violence especially during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Recommendation #5: Establish dedicated funding for anti-racism related initiatives and invest in resources that support the development of safe spaces and inclusive programs and services for racialized LGBTQIA+ immigrants, refugees, and newcomers.

- Ensure that anti-racism training is offered to both immigrant and refugee serving agencies and LGBTQIA+ mandated organizations in order to build and strengthen anti-oppression and anti-racism competency on all levels.
- Collaborate with BIPOC created, led, focused and serving LGBTQIA+ organizations and groups.
- Develop an audit system in collaboration with the Anti-Racism Secretariat for agencies to access and evaluate their existing programs and services to ensure racialized LGBTQIA+ communities receive adequate and quality services.
- Ensure that data collection and reporting, including immigration arrivals data collected by IRCC, include an intersectional lens, which takes into consideration the multiple and intersecting identities alongside SOGIESC demographic measures.

8. In addition to your previous response, and reflecting on existing Government of Canada policies and programs, please identify any policies and programs that your organization would like to see improved to better meet the needs of LGBTQ2 people in Canada. In your response, please explain why and how they should be amended.

The Government of Canada has an ongoing commitment to diversity and inclusion, and working towards the elimination of racism and discrimination. Action is already being taken across the federal government to help make a difference in the lives of Canadians by addressing systemic barriers and particular challenges that result from racism. Both Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy and Canada's Multiculturalism policy will need to support initiatives such as research and training for racialized LGBTQIA + communities particularly those living in the intersections of legal status, language, and class.