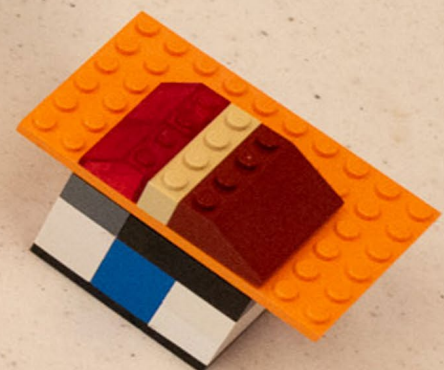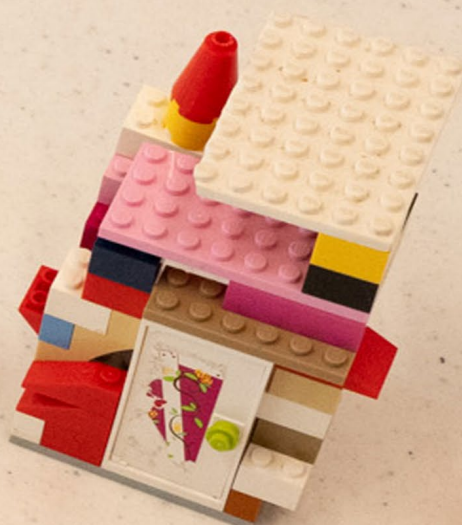Greater Victoria
Local Immigration
Partnership

presents

Building Our Vision

Hope for Home

Collective Actions Towards
Immigrant Housing Solutions

powered by **iCa** Inter-Cultural
Association
of Greater Victoria

Table of Content

Land Acknowledgement

We preface our work by recognizing the land on which we stand, the ancestral territories of the Coast Salish, Kwakwaka'wakw, and Nuu-cha-nulth Nations. Vancouver Island is a land of great beauty and significance, encompassing diverse landscapes from its towering mountains, lush rainforests, and fertile farmlands to its winding rivers, fjords, and coastal beaches. These lands have long been home to Indigenous peoples, whose histories, cultures, and relationships to the land continue to this day.

As settlers and immigrants, we acknowledge the profound and ongoing impacts of colonization, and we recognize that the displacement of Indigenous peoples continues to shape the lived experiences of all who call this land home. We commit to working together with Indigenous communities, honoring their knowledge, and striving for meaningful, respectful partnerships in the creation of solutions that recognize the sovereignty, rights, and needs of Indigenous peoples.

In advocating for equitable housing solutions for immigrants and refugees, we are reminded of the importance of considering the histories and ongoing struggles of Indigenous communities, and we are committed to ensuring that the voices and needs of Indigenous peoples are woven into the fabric of any housing plan we pursue. As we work toward creating a more inclusive and just housing system on Vancouver Island, we pledge to do so with respect, humility, and a deep awareness of the original stewards of this land.

Let this land acknowledgement serve as both an expression of gratitude for the opportunity to live and work on these lands, and as a reminder of our collective responsibility to foster an equitable, just, and sustainable future for all, including the Indigenous peoples whose connections to this land predate us all.

Introduction

The event Hope for Home: Building an Immigrant Housing Action Plan Together was a response to the growing need for inclusive, sustainable, and culturally appropriate housing solutions for immigrants, refugees, and displaced populations on Vancouver Island. This need has been amplified by the region's increasing housing crisis, which affects both newcomers and long-time residents alike.

Vancouver Island has witnessed significant population growth in recent years, with an estimated 8% increase in the region's population between 2016 and 2021. This growth has intensified housing demand, making rental properties, especially affordable and suitable housing, increasingly scarce. By the end of 2023, the South Island region, including Greater Victoria, became one of the most expensive rental markets in the country, with the average two-bedroom rental costing $2,786 a month. In parallel, regions like Nanaimo, Courtenay, and Campbell River are also experiencing rising costs, placing a strain on housing affordability across the island.

For immigrants, especially those arriving from conflict zones like Ukraine, Afghanistan, Syria, and Sudan, this housing market presents unique challenges. Many of these individuals arrive with limited financial resources, a lack of knowledge of local systems, and language barriers, which makes it even more difficult to access appropriate housing. Additionally, many displaced families are forced into overcrowded living conditions, paying a higher percentage of their income on rent, or experiencing housing instability.

About the Hope for Home Event

At the Hope for Home event held on November 22, 2024 in Greater Victoria, BC, participants from a variety of sectors came together to discuss innovative ways to address local housing challenges. The event's goal was to co-create a foundation for finding solutions that would meet the housing needs of immigrant and refugee populations on Vancouver Island, while also addressing broader issues of housing affordability, inclusion, and systemic barriers.

To address the complex and interconnected challenges faced by immigrant communities in securing and maintaining housing, the Hope for Home event created space to explore five critical themes through case studies developed from multiple interviews with settlement workers and newcomers with lived experience. These different narratives provided grounded, real-world insights into the struggles and resilience of immigrant families navigating the housing system and helped inform the discussions that followed.
To view the event guide, click here.

Participants engaged in collaborative discussions, shared their experiences, brainstormed solutions, and co-created action plans on some of these solutions. More information on the five core discussion themes follows below.

Systems

The systems approach emphasizes the interconnected elements—policies, resources, partnerships, and infrastructure—that must work together to create supportive housing for immigrants. Key issues include:

- **Government Policies and Standards:** Local, provincial, and federal housing policies influencing affordability, availability, and eligibility criteria. Ensuring landlords and developers comply with housing standards and understand immigrant tenants' unique needs.
- **Community Partnerships:** Collaboration between immigrant-serving organizations, municipalities, and advocacy groups to provide comprehensive support.
- **Data & Research:** Collecting race-based and intersectional data to monitor trends and identify gaps in the housing system.
- **Financial Systems:** Funding models for affordable housing, including grants and innovative investments.
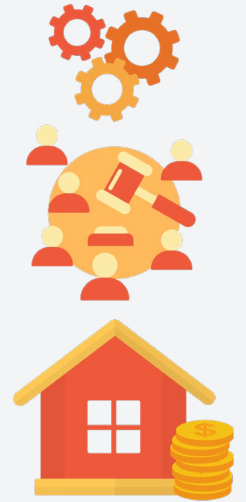
Housing Fit

Housing fit refers to how well housing meets the needs of immigrants and is suitable for the size of immigrant families. Key issues include:

- **Family Size & Housing Availability:** Difficulty finding homes for large families or single individuals.
- **National Occupancy Standards:** Complications and misunderstandings around national occupancy standards as prescriptive or optional.

Isolation

Isolation, both physical and social, is a major challenge, especially for those living in remote areas. Key issues include:

- **Urban vs. Suburban vs. Remote Living:** Suburban or remote areas may lack community resources, leading to loneliness and isolation.
- **Neighborhood Integration:** Cultural differences and language barriers often hinder social integration, and racism adds to the difficulty.

Mental Health

Housing instability and trauma have significant psychological effects on immigrant populations. Key issues include:

- **Psychological Effects of Housing Insecurity:** The fear of eviction and uncertainty about future housing contributes to mental health issues like stress, anxiety, and depression.
- **Mental Health Support:** Limited access to mental health services leaves many struggling to cope with the emotional toll of previous trauma, while housing instability and isolation further hinder recovery.
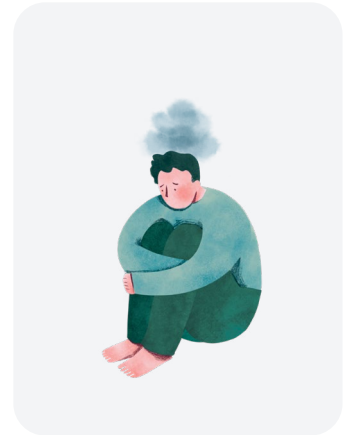
Conflict

Racism, cultural misunderstandings, and systemic biases create frequent housing conflicts for immigrants. Key issues include:

- **Racism & Discrimination:** Immigrants face bias from landlords, neighbors, and service providers, leading to exclusion and substandard housing.
- **Cultural Differences & Integration:** Misunderstandings about cultural practices can lead to disputes with landlords or neighbors, hindering integration.
- **Systemic Bias & Conflict Resolution:** Institutional biases in housing policies and law enforcement often prevent effective conflict resolution, requiring increased cultural competency and accessible mediation services.
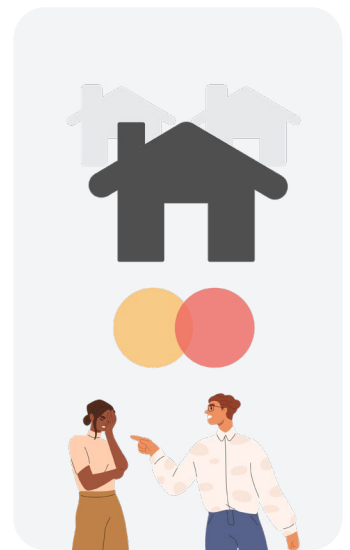
Purpose and Structure of this Document

This document presents the summaries of the action plans and discussions that took place at the Hope for Home event.

The document is designed to be a jumping board for ideas rather than a prescriptive set of instructions. Its primary aim is to serve as a nurturing space—an "idea hive" where inspiration is sparked, cultivated, and shared. While the action plans outlined in each section offer actionable steps, the document itself is suggestive, not definitive. It encourages all interest holders—community organizations, government bodies, landlords, and immigrants themselves—to engage, collaborate, and continue building on these ideas as they take shape.

The document is divided into five sections following the core themes that were discussed at the event: systems, housing fit, isolation, mental health, and conflict. Each of the five thematic sections is organized as follows:

- Summary of one or two action plans that were co-created by event participants on that theme.

- List of additional recommendations (an "idea garden") collated by participants around that same theme.

How we created this document

This document is based on the notes of assigned notetakers and the visual aids that were used to track conversations at the tables. This information was then collated in one summary document and split into themes. Once a full draft was created, GVLIP Housing Sector Table partners helped with editing and clarifying the action plans and lists of recommendations. This document is the result of a truly collaborative process.

When talking about such complex issues around housing, it is inevitable that similar ideas pop-up across different themes. To keep this document concise, some recurring recommendations were moved under the most fitting theme, and repeated mentions were removed. In such cases, it was always established that the original meaning of the recommendation was preserved.

Key to the Action Plans

Each section begins with two action plans that include concrete steps to address the issues at hand. These action plans are followed by an "idea garden" of further possibilities and recommendations for changes.
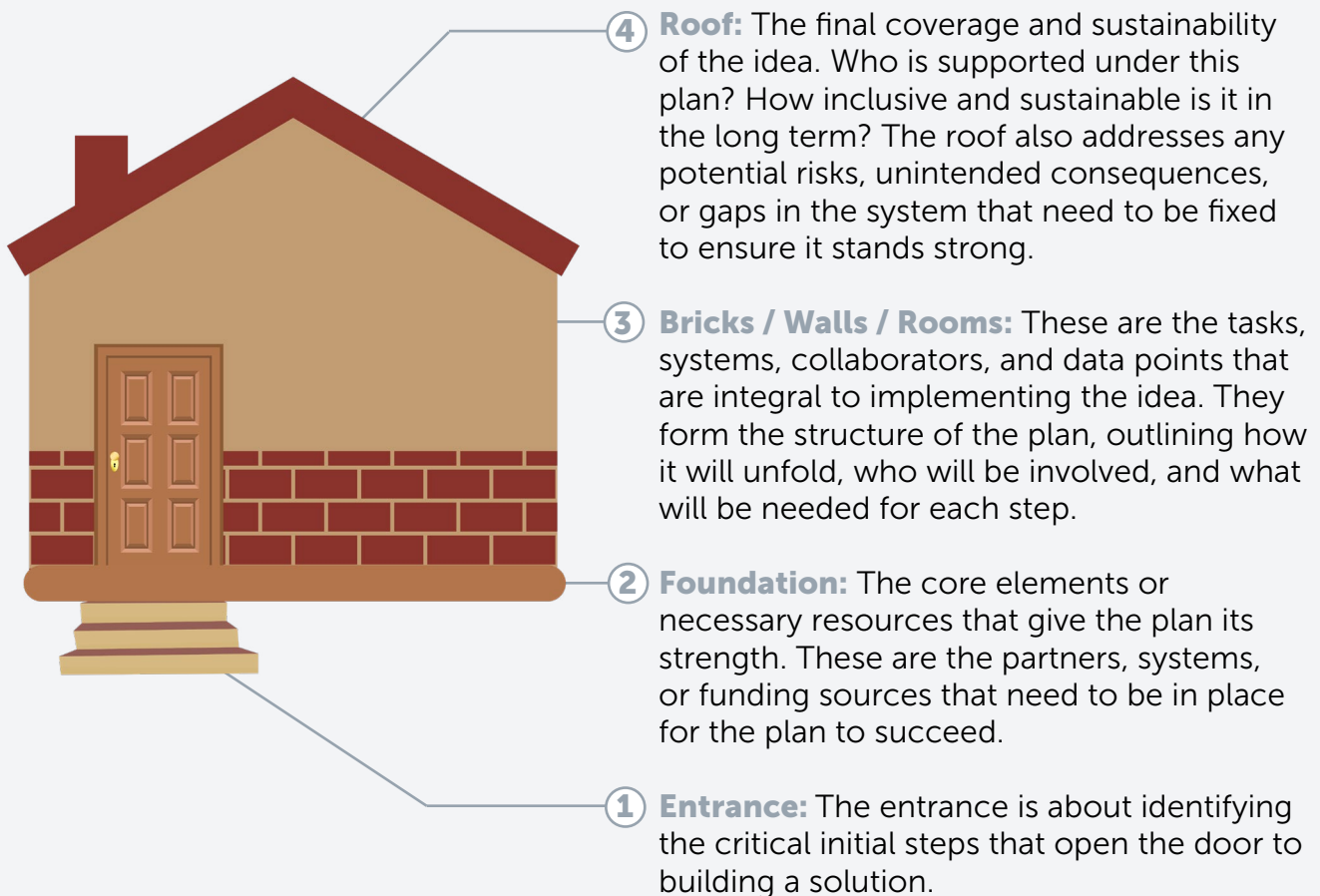
One of the central metaphors used during the co-creation of the action plans was the "house"—each aspect of the plan was mapped onto different parts of a house (entrance, foundation, walls, bricks/rooms, and roof) to symbolize a building process.

Action Plan I

Action Plan II

Idea Garden

Below is the expanded explanation of the metaphor used:

(4) **Roof:** The final coverage and sustainability of the idea. Who is supported under this plan? How inclusive and sustainable is it in the long term? The roof also addresses any potential risks, unintended consequences, or gaps in the system that need to be fixed to ensure it stands strong.

(3) **Bricks / Walls / Rooms:** These are the tasks, systems, collaborators, and data points that are integral to implementing the idea. They form the structure of the plan, outlining how it will unfold, who will be involved, and what will be needed for each step.

(2) **Foundation:** The core elements or necessary resources that give the plan its strength. These are the partners, systems, or funding sources that need to be in place for the plan to succeed.

(1) **Entrance:** The entrance is about identifying the critical initial steps that open the door to building a solution.

A. SYSTEMS for Immigrant Housing on Vancouver Island

Immigrants face significant challenges in securing stable, affordable housing due to factors like cultural differences, language barriers, systemic racism, systems misalignment, and limited financial resources. Proposed solutions focus on systemic changes, community collaboration, and wrap-around support services that address not just housing, but employment, mental health, and integration. This would ensure housing is treated as a human right and would help create long-term affordability and stability for immigrant families.

The key to a more equitable housing system lies in systemic change— from creating compliance mechanisms for landlords to offering holistic, wrap-around support services that tackle the root causes of housing instability. This vision aligns with the goal of helping immigrants and refugees achieve long-term housing stability while supporting community integration and economic self-sufficiency.
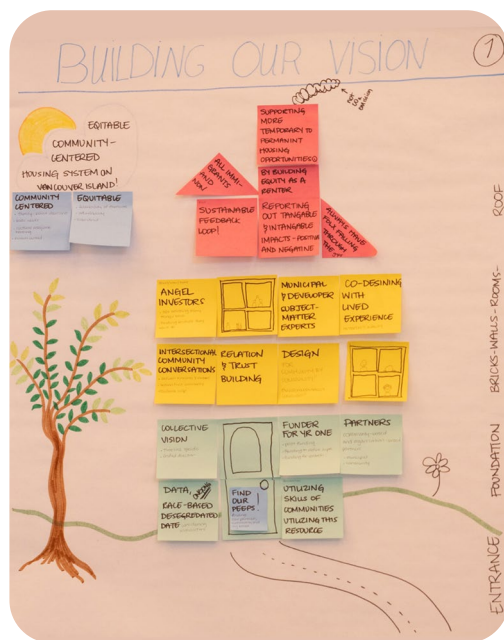
Action Plan 1: Designing an Equitable, Community-Centered Housing Solutions Plan

Action Plan 2: Drafting a Proposal for Policy Reform and New Housing Models

Action Plan 1: **Designing an Equitable, Community-Centered Housing Solutions Plan**

An equitable, community-centered housing solutions plan prioritizes family-based decisions, culturally appropriate affordable housing, and human-centered solutions.

ENTRANCE (STARTING POINT)

Finding Our Partners

Identify and engage community-based organizations and municipal partners working in housing, refugee resettlement, and immigrant services. This network will help guide and contribute to the plan. Cultivate a strong collaborative environment to ensure broad support for the plan.

## FOUNDATION (ESTABLISHING CORE ELEMENTS)
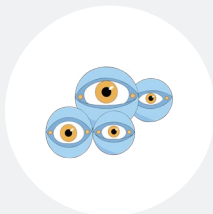
Create a Collective Vision

- Develop a clear, unified direction aligned with the needs of both immigrant communities and local interest holders.
- Establish timelines and clear goals to ensure forward momentum.

Pilot Funding

- Secure pilot funding in the first year to test and develop new housing programs and strategies.
- Funding will support identifying suitable housing options and support services for newcomers.
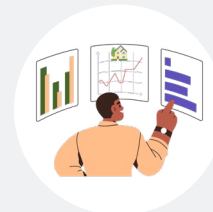
Data Collection

- Collect race-based and intersectional data to assess the unique needs of immigrant populations, ensuring policies are tailored to the diversity of the community.
- Address data gaps and ensure data validity for accurate insights.

BRICKS/WALLS/ROOMS (IMPLEMENTATION)

Angel Investors

Introduce angel investors who are willing to invest in social impact rather than profit. These investors would help provide critical funding to initiatives that foster positive change.

Community Conversations

- Facilitate intersectional community conversations to build trust and relationships among tenants, landlords, and the broader community.
- Focus on understanding community needs and fostering a collaborative feedback loop.

Co-Designing Housing

- Co-design housing solutions with people who have lived experience to ensure designs are both practical and culturally appropriate.
- Collaborate with municipalities and developers who have expertise to co-create housing solutions that serve the community.

Collaboration

Ensure the municipal government and private developers actively participate in co-design processes to bring innovative, community-driven housing solutions to life.

ROOF (SUSTAINABILITY & LONG-TERM SUCCESS)

Sustainable Housing Pathways

The plan must ensure a continuous, sustainable path for renters to build equity and long-term stability in their homes through temporary-to-permanent housing pathways.

Accountability

Ensure tangible and intangible reporting on the impact of housing interventions, both positive and negative. This will help assess the success of the initiative and maintain accountability to all interest holders.

Addressing Gaps

There will always be individuals or families who face barriers in accessing housing, and efforts to address these gaps must be ongoing to ensure no one is left behind.

Action Plan 2: **Drafting a Proposal for Policy Reform and New Housing Models**
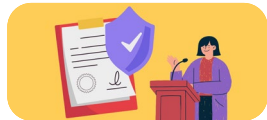
Through drafting policy reform and new housing models, newcomers would be positioned as reliable renters and given equal access to housing opportunities. Policies and processes would support newcomers with the necessary tools and resources for obtaining housing and successful integration into Canadian society.

ENTRANCE (STARTING POINT)

Evaluate Systems

Evaluate current systems and proposals for systemic changes that can pave the way for a more inclusive housing system.

FOUNDATION (ESTABLISHING CORE ELEMENTS)

Policy Development

For example, develop Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) renters' insurance (similar to mortgage insurance) and Insurance Corporation of British Columbia (ICBC) landlord insurance to reduce financial risks for landlords and provide greater security for renters.

BRICKS/WALLS/ROOMS (IMPLEMENTATION)

Inclusive Application Process
Create an inclusive, accessible application process for housing that considers the unique needs of immigrants, including language barriers, lack of local rental history, and cultural differences.

Landlord Education
Focus on educating landlords to understand the challenges faced by immigrant renters and how to make their housing more accessible.

Partnerships with Community Organizations
Establish strong partnerships with community organizations that can serve as the first point of contact for newcomers, offering guidance and support throughout the rental process.

Project Coordinator
A project coordinator will be essential to oversee the project's implementation, ensuring all partners are aligned and the program stays on track.

ROOF (SUSTAINABILITY & LONG-TERM SUCCESS)

Replicability
The housing system must be designed to be replicable across different cities, provinces, and agencies, ensuring it can be adapted to various regional needs.
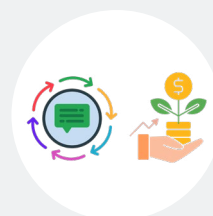
Feedback Loops & Long-Term Funding
The model needs consistent funding and a feedback loop to ensure its long-term sustainability. Regular assessments will help identify areas for improvement and maintain the system's effectiveness.

Collaboration & Collective Vision

Collaborative Approach: Housing solutions should emphasize collaboration with community organizations and municipal partners to establish a unified direction.

Co-Designing Solutions: Housing solutions would be co-designed with input from those with lived experience to ensure they are both practical and culturally relevant.

Simplify Rental Requirements: Traditional rental application processes often require documents like job references, bank statements, or rental histories, which many immigrants lack. Instead, use referrals from community organizations or direct assistance in securing job placements to streamline rental eligibility for immigrants.

**Pathways from Temporary to Permanent Housing:** The overarching goal is to create pathways from temporary to permanent housing, helping immigrants and refugees build equity and integrate into the community.

Housing Subsidy Delays: Long delays in housing subsidies can create uncertainty and stress for newcomers. Streamlining the subsidy process and improving timeliness would provide newcomers with greater security and stability.

Break Down Systemic Barriers to Renting

Flip the Vicious Cycle into a Virtuous One
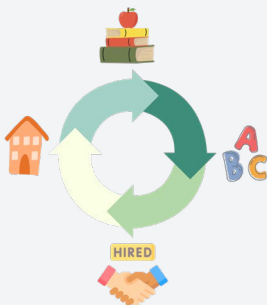
Address the Housing Stability Vicious Cycle: Immigrants often face a vicious cycle: *No home address —> No school —> No English —> No jobs —> No hope.* This cycle exacerbates social isolation and prevents full integration into Canadian society.

Virtuous Cycle: Secure housing would enable immigrants to break the cycle and gain the stability needed to contribute meaningfully to society.

Landlord Compliance Branch: Ensuring that landlords meet standards for providing affordable, healthy, and sustainable housing.

Educating Landlords: Raise awareness among landlords about the unique challenges immigrants face, creating a more inclusive rental market.

Incentives for Landlords: Municipal incentives to encourage landlords to provide affordable rental options, especially flexible units like garden suites or shared housing arrangements.

Landlord-Tenant Relations & Compliance

Tenant Education: Ensuring that tenants are educated about their rights, especially in contexts where language barriers or a lack of information exist. Providing legal resources and workshops can help newcomers understand how to deal with difficult landlords, housing discrimination, and how to navigate the rental market.

Take Profits Out of Housing

Shift to Non-Profit Housing: Transition away from profit-driven housing models towards non-profit and cooperative housing models, ensuring that housing remains affordable and community-centered. Tenants have a say in the management of their spaces, fostering a sense of belonging and long-term stability and housing can be tailored to meet the needs of different cultural groups, enhancing the sense of home for immigrants.

Flexible Eligibility Requirements: The establishment of flexible eligibility requirements for housing programs that can accommodate the unique needs of immigrants, including variations in income, housing history, and cultural practices.

Flexible Eligibility & Funding

Surplus Funding: Creation of surplus funding to support those who may fall through the cracks, such as individuals needing financial support after their initial 12-month period of settlement assistance.

Pilot Funding & Data Collection: Solutions might need to involve pilot funding in the first year, along with race-based and intersectional data collection to better understand the needs of immigrant communities.

B. HOUSING FIT and Appropriate Housing

Housing Fit addresses the need for housing that is not only physically appropriate for residents but also culturally, socially, and economically conducive to integration, especially for immigrant and refugee populations. This concept highlights the importance of housing that supports the long-term success of individuals, promotes community integration, and is adaptable to the diverse needs of various groups. Given the housing affordability crisis on Vancouver Island, the focus is on creating flexible housing systems that meet the specific needs of all residents, particularly marginalized groups.

The following two action plans explore solutions in more detail.
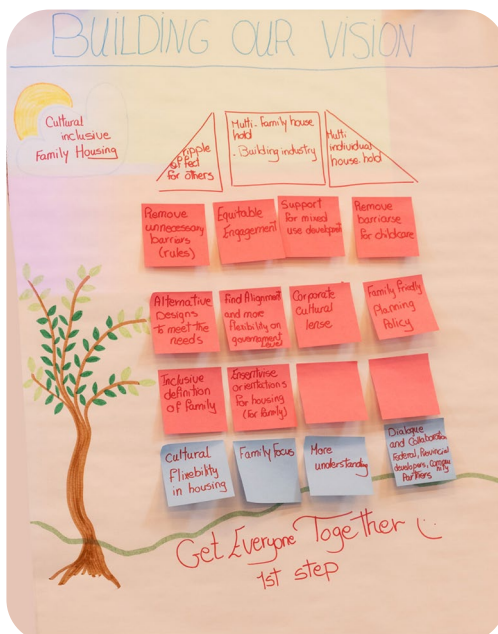
Action Plan 3: *Designing a Framework for Culturally Inclusive Family Housing*

Action Plan 4: *Creating a Housing Database of Secondary Suites*

Action Plan 3: **Designing a Framework for Culturally Inclusive Family Housing**

Designing a framework for culturally inclusive family housing solutions would meet diverse needs in a culturally responsive, family-centered, and inclusive manner.

ENTRANCE (STARTING POINT)

Collaboration

Bring together all relevant interest holders (including: community organizations, municipalities, developers, immigrant service organizations, housing experts) to lay the foundation for a collaborative, culturally sensitive, and inclusive housing system.

FOUNDATION (ESTABLISHING CORE ELEMENTS)

Cultural Flexibility Framework

Build a framework for cultural flexibility in housing that adapts to the unique needs of immigrant populations, while maintaining high standards for safety and affordability.

(Non-Traditional) Family-Centered Housing

Prioritize family-centered housing solutions, ensuring that housing is accessible for: nuclear families, extended families, and non-traditional family structures.

Promoting Dialogue and Collaboration

Foster open dialogue and collaboration among all levels of government, developers, and community partners to ensure that: all voices are heard, and housing policies reflect the diverse needs of families and communities.

BRICKS/WALLS/ROOMS (IMPLEMENTATION)

Removing Barriers to Housing Access

Eliminate unnecessary obstacles to housing, such as: overly strict income requirements, lack of documentation, and family size restrictions, because these barriers disproportionately affect newcomers.

Equitable Community Engagement

Actively involve immigrants and other marginalized groups in the planning and design of housing projects. Ensure that their voices and needs are central to development.

Mixed-Use Developments

Support mixed-use developments that combine residential, retail, and community spaces. These developments will provide holistic support for newcomers and encourage social integration and access to essential services.
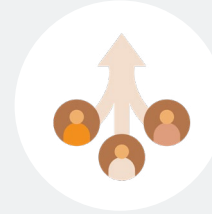
Alignment Across Government Levels

Ensure alignment between municipal, provincial, and federal housing policies. This will create a coordinated, flexible approach to housing design and allocation that meets diverse needs.

Family-Friendly Policies

Implement family-friendly planning policies, including: childcare facilities, schools, and community spaces. These policies will help support young families and make housing more suitable for them.

ROOF (SUSTAINABILITY & LONG-TERM SUCCESS)

Ripple Effect of Framework

The impact of this framework goes beyond just housing. It will positively influence: the housing sector, multi-family households, and the broader community.

Value of Multi-Individual & Multi-Family Households

Multi-individual and multi-family households should be recognized as valuable components of the community fabric and eligible for the necessary resources and services, such as childcare, healthcare, and social integration programs.

Creating a Housing Database of Secondary Suites

A "Housing Database of Secondary Suites" would make often underutilized housing available to a diverse range of tenants.

ENTRANCE (STARTING POINT)

Data Collection on Secondary Suites

Gather data on the availability of secondary suites, which can be an underutilized yet affordable housing option. Key actions include understanding why secondary suites aren't being rented out (e.g., legal concerns, financial instability, or risks). This insight will inform actions to expand this affordable housing option.
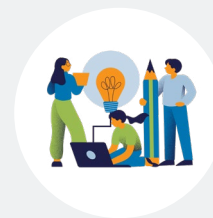
FOUNDATION (ESTABLISHING CORE ELEMENTS)

Coordination and Team Structure

A small team of 1-3 people will be responsible for: data collection, interest holder identification, and outreach strategy development. Collaboration with community groups, including faith-based organizations, will be essential to connect with both landlords and tenants.

### *Seed Funding and Technological Infrastructure*

Initial funding will be required to launch the initiative, focusing on technological infrastructure, such as an app or platform to manage the housing database. This platform will host listings of available secondary suites.

Understanding Municipal Policies

- A deep understanding of municipal policies is required, particularly around the legalization of secondary suites. Many municipalities may not legally recognize these units, leading to hesitancy among landlords. To address this, policy flexibility will be needed.
- Tax relief could be offered to landlords who participate in this housing initiative.
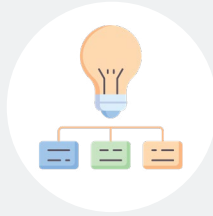
Guiding Framework EAST

The database creation will follow the **EAST** framework, which ensures that secondary suites are: **E**asy to list and find; **A**ttainable for renters; **S**ocially accessible; **T**imely, ensuring swift responses to rental needs to make their housing more accessible.

Partnerships

This approach will require building trust through outreach and partnership agreements with housing organizations.
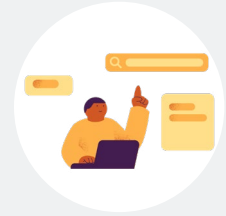
Technology and Platform Development

- Technology will be integral to this project, including: a search engine or platform where secondary suites can be listed & searched.
- Low-tech options are considered to ensure accessibility for all users, especially those with limited digital literacy.

Diverse Group of Potential Tenants

The housing database could serve a wide range of individuals and groups, including: newcomer families, Indigenous families, seniors, and unhoused individuals.

Safe Housing

It is essential to ensure that tenant placements are safe and well-vetted to avoid exploitation or

Addressing Misinformation and Education

One of the key challenges is counteracting misinformation about secondary suites, such as fears of: poor living conditions and illegal units. Outreach and education campaigns will be vital in addressing these concerns and ensuring both tenants and landlords feel safe and supported throughout the process.

Cultural Relevance & Inclusivity in Design

Culturally Relevant Properties: Design homes to respect cultural norms and preferences, such as spaces for multi-generational living or shared housing. Include elements like communal kitchens, gathering spaces, or culturally significant materials that reflect the identity of residents while maintaining safety and comfort.

Cultural Design Guidelines: Develop cultural design guidelines that go beyond basic accessibility standards to incorporate the unique needs of immigrant populations. Engage community members and cultural experts to create housing that accommodates both the functional and cultural needs of residents.

Age: Adjust age restrictions for renting or owning homes, acknowledging that immigrant families may have different household structures and age-related needs.

Gender: Ensure housing policies are inclusive of diverse gender identities and expressions. Gender-based room-sharing rules often create barriers for immigrant families, particularly those with different cultural norms. Removing these rules would offer flexible housing options for all families. This would alleviate some of the strain on families who face additional challenges in securing housing.

Household Size: Change occupancy limits to allow larger families (5-7 people) to live together in single housing units, acknowledging the extended family structures common in immigrant populations. Remove penalties for large households, which often face overcrowding and unsuitable living conditions.

Flexible Housing Policies
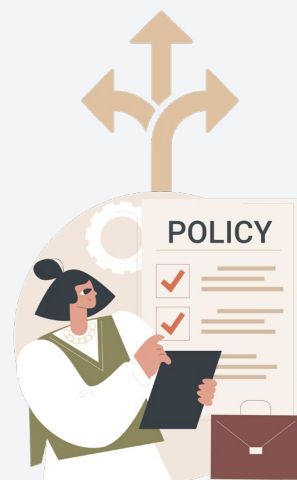
Public Transportation & Sustainable Design

Public Transit Accessibility: Design housing developments near public transit routes to ensure residents, particularly those without personal vehicles, can easily access employment, education, and community services.

Car-Free Living and Sustainable Design: Encourage car-free living in areas with good public transit. Housing designs should promote walking, cycling, and public transit as the primary means of transportation.

High-Density Layouts: Ensure that new housing projects are designed with high-density layouts that complement existing public transit systems, contributing to a more sustainable and equitable urban environment.

Community Integration & Social Connection
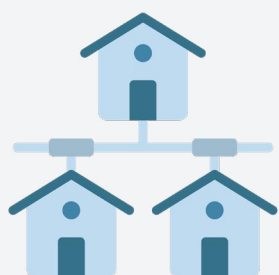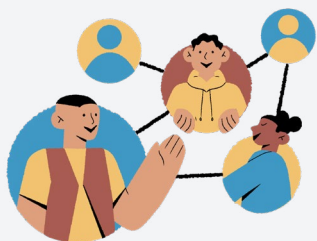
Mixed-Use Housing Developments: Encourage the development of mixed-use housing that combines residential, commercial, and community spaces. This creates vibrant, integrated communities where residents can access services such as childcare, grocery stores, and job training programs. Ensure that housing is located near employment opportunities and local businesses, fostering economic integration and social connection.

Workforce Housing and Transitional Housing: Create transitional housing specifically for immigrants and refugees moving from temporary shelters or housing into more permanent homes. Partner with local employers to align housing availability with employment opportunities, ensuring long-term economic stability for residents.

Putting People in Homes for Longer-Term Stability: The focus should be on creating long-term housing solutions that foster community stability for immigrants and refugees. Housing should not be a temporary stop but a foundation for belonging and contribution. Encourage longer-term leases and tenancy agreements to reduce turnover, fostering more sustainable communities.

Tenant Protection and Fair Treatment: Tenant Protection and Fair Treatment housing policies should prioritize human rights, ensuring all tenants—regardless of immigration status—have access to safe, affordable, and dignified living conditions.

Enforce tenant protection laws: Enforce tenant protection laws to ensure fair treatment across all cultural groups and backgrounds.

Human Rights in Tenancy

Collaboration Between Immigrant and Indigenous Communities

Cross-Cultural Collaboration: Promote collaboration between immigrant and Indigenous communities, recognizing shared experiences of displacement and colonization. Mutual support can foster understanding and build stronger communities. Encourage joint housing projects or community outreach programs that bridge gaps and create more inclusive housing solutions.

Government Flexibility: Advocate for more flexibility from government organizations such as municipalities, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and BC Housing in areas like zoning, family definitions, and subsidy eligibility.

Advocacy for Policy Flexibility at Higher Levels of Government

Addressing Competition for Housing Resources

Equitable Distribution of Resources: As immigrant populations grow, there can be competition for affordable housing, jobs, and social services. A balanced housing system is needed to ensure equitable access for all groups.

Implement better resource management and community outreach to ensure that immigrant and refugee populations are not left behind in these competitive environments.

C. ISOLATION and Community Integration

Isolation is a significant challenge faced by newcomers (immigrants and refugees) adjusting to life in a new country. Social isolation stems from various barriers, including language differences, limited transportation access, lack of information, and cultural differences.

These barriers make it difficult for newcomers to connect with their communities, access services, and build social support networks. A comprehensive approach is needed to address these issues by improving service access, offering educational resources, and fostering community engagement.

The following two action plans explore solutions in more detail.

Action Plan 5: *Designing a Centralized Service Platform for Newcomers*
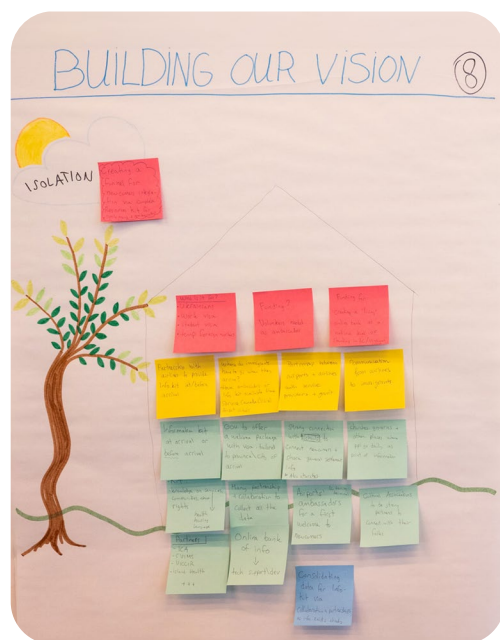
Action Plan 6: *Creating a Newcomer Integration Funnel*

Action Plan 5: Designing a Centralized Service Platform for Newcomers

A centralized service platform reduces isolation among newcomers by providing them with centralized, easily accessible information about available services.

## ENTRANCE (STARTING POINT)

Establish Partnerships

The first step is to create partnerships between municipalities, service providers, and community organizations, including libraries and community centers. These groups will collaborate to distribute information about housing, services, and local programs, ensuring that newcomers are aware of the resources available to them.

Centralized Access

A key part of this vision is creating centralized platforms, both online and offline, where newcomers can easily access services and resources. This ensures streamlined access to the information needed for successful settlement.

FOUNDATION (ESTABLISHING CORE ELEMENTS)
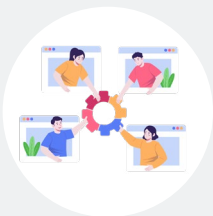
Collaborating Settlement Organizations

Form strong relationships with settlement organizations to help connect newcomers with services more efficiently. These partnerships will ensure that services are tailored to the specific needs of newcomers.

Data Collection

Gather data on the needs and service usage of newcomers. This data will inform how services are designed, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively and meet the evolving needs of the community.

Effective Communication Channels

Establish robust communication channels between community centers and neighborhood organizations to circulate up-to-date information on available services and resources.

BRICKS/WALLS/ROOMS (IMPLEMENTATION)

Centralized Service Platform
Develop a centralized platform or database where newcomers can easily find information on available services. This could be a website, printed brochures, or social media channels that provide detailed guides on housing, settlement services, and community resources.

Multi-language Support
Ensure that materials are available in multiple languages, and distribute printed brochures to every household, particularly those without internet access.

Staff Training
Frontline staff in libraries, community hubs, and service providers should be trained to guide newcomers to available resources. Staff should be well-informed about housing services, settlement support, and community activities.

Landlord Engagement
Build relationships with landlords to ensure they are aware of and can help direct their tenants to available community services.

ROOF (SUSTAINABILITY & LONG-TERM SUCCESS)

Service Demand vs. Supply
As services become more widely available, there is a risk that demand could surpass the available resources, especially if funding and budgets do not keep pace. This could result in long waiting times or limited access.

Administrative and Logistical Costs
Maintaining a comprehensive service network may become increasingly expensive. It's essential that funding keeps pace with the growth of these programs to ensure continued service delivery.

### Community Relationship-Building
The success of this initiative hinges on building and maintaining strong community relationships. Ongoing partnerships between municipalities, organizations, and service providers will be key to ensuring accurate and timely information is available.

Commitment and Long-Term Funding
Continuous funding, strong community partnerships, and organizational commitment are necessary to maintain the accuracy and reliability of service delivery.

## Action Plan 6: **Creating a Newcomer Integration Funnel**
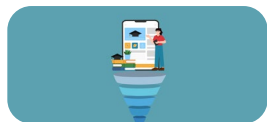
The Newcomer Integration Funnel is aimed at providing newcomers with the essential information, tools, and resources to successfully integrate into Canadian society.

ENTRANCE (STARTING POINT)

Comprehensive Information Kit

The first step is to gather and consolidate local data on already available resources and services for newcomers.
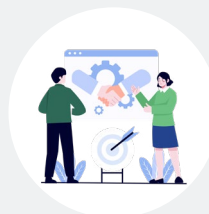
Establish Partnerships

Establish Partnerships with local organizations to ensure the kit is comprehensive and widely distributed.

### FOUNDATION (ESTABLISHING CORE ELEMENTS)

Government Welcome Package

The government can create a tailored welcome package for each province or city. This package would include essential documents and guidance on housing, healthcare, legal rights, and settlement services.
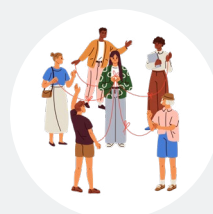
Strengthening Community Connections

Collaborations with schools, churches, and community centers will provide newcomers with trusted points of contact for information. These institutions can help facilitate the integration process and offer support in the early stages of settlement.

BRICKS/WALLS/ROOMS (IMPLEMENTATION)
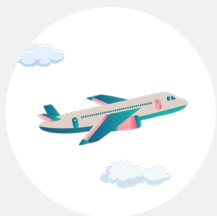
Partnership with Airlines and Service Providers

Establishing partnerships with airlines and other service providers will help ensure newcomers receive their information kits either before or immediately upon arrival in Canada.

First Points of Contact

Airports, schools, and service centers like Service Canada can act as initial touchpoints for distributing these kits and offering guidance.
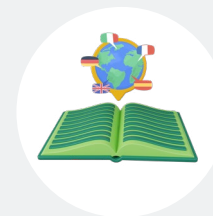
Develop a multilingual comprehensive settlement kit for newcomers (digital and print)

The kit will include a wide range of resources such as settlement services, housing options, public transportation guides, language programs, and mental health services to support newcomers throughout their integration process.

ROOF (SUSTAINABILITY & LONG-TERM SUCCESS)

Inclusivity

The newcomer integration funnel should be inclusive of all newcomer groups, including Ukrainians, temporary foreign workers, work and study visa holders, and refugees. This ensures that everyone, regardless of their status, has access to critical settlement information and support.

Volunteers as Ambassadors

Volunteers will play a crucial role in helping newcomers navigate their new environment. They can act as ambassadors, offering guidance and support in the settlement process.

Online Resource Hub

To ensure the initiative remains dynamic and up-to-date, an online resource hub should be developed. This platform should be continuously updated to provide current information about services, resources, and programs.

Expanding Across Canada

The initiative could start in British Columbia and later expand to other provinces, ensuring that newcomers across the country can benefit from this program.

Outreach and Visibility of Services

Service visibility is crucial for newcomers to access settlement services, legal advice, language programs, and more. Use public spaces such as libraries, community centers, and public transit to advertise services. Digital and physical outreach, such as brochures or flyers, can help raise awareness about available resources.

Local Supports: Offer language programs in communities where newcomers reside. Provide digital literacy programs to help newcomers navigate online resources, access services, and secure employment.

Language and Digital Literacy Support

Community Programming and Social Connections
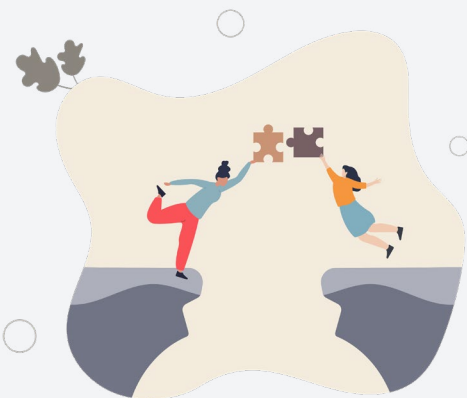
Neighborhood Associations as Bridge between Newcomers and Long-Term Residents: These associations can be hubs for information sharing about local resources, community activities, and services. They can also help facilitate relationship-building between newcomers and established community members through community programs.

Community Programs: Social isolation can be reduced by organizing community programs that encourage social interaction. Free neighborhood dinners, community meet-ups, and local associations can foster a sense of belonging and help newcomers connect to their neighborhoods.

Cultural education programs are necessary to foster mutual understanding and integration between newcomers and local communities.

Subsidized transit passes or car-share programs (e.g., Evo, Modo) could help alleviate transportation challenges.

Public Transit Support

## Create a Comprehensive Support Structure for Displaced Ukrainians

Coordinated support structures are needed to provide clear and accessible pathways to housing, employment, and community engagement for Ukrainian newcomers.

Focus on Community Building: Multi-family living arrangements can foster social cohesion and community building, reducing isolation and increasing opportunities for mutual support. Shared childcare, elder care, and collaborative cultural activities help build supportive networks. Housing should be more than just shelter— it should provide a social anchor for immigrants, supporting their integration into the broader community.

Holistic Support: Support for immigrants and refugees needs to go beyond housing. Proposed wrap-around services would address: language barriers, employment support, mental health services, and community building initiatives to facilitate integration and social cohesion.

Community Farming Initiatives: Many immigrant families have agricultural traditions that are central to their cultural practices. Incorporating community farming into housing developments creates a sense of community ownership, promotes environmental and food sustainability, and enhances cultural integration through shared community spaces.

## Promote Community-Minded Multi-Family Living
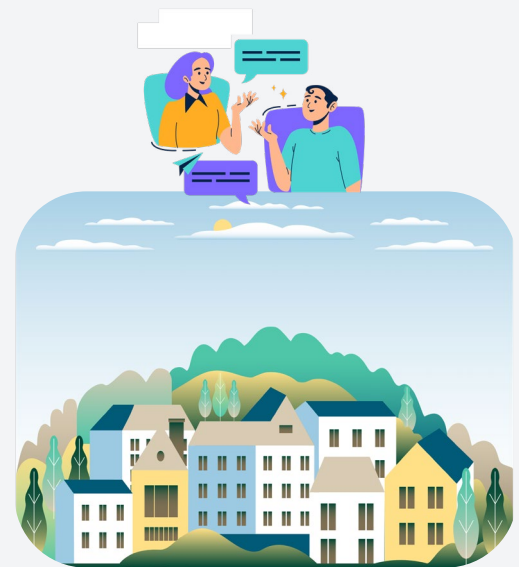
D. MENTAL HEALTH Effects on Housing Security

Navigating the challenges of securing affordable housing, adjusting to a new culture, and managing resettlement stress can have a significant impact on newcomers' mental well-being. Housing instability, social isolation, and cultural misunderstandings often exacerbate these challenges, leading to long-term mental health consequences. By addressing mental health within the housing context and integrating support services into settlement programs, we can create a more supportive environment that helps newcomers build stability, reduce isolation, and thrive in their new communities.

The following two action plans explore solutions in more detail.

Action Plan 7: *Designing Mental Health Focused Intercultural Competence Training*
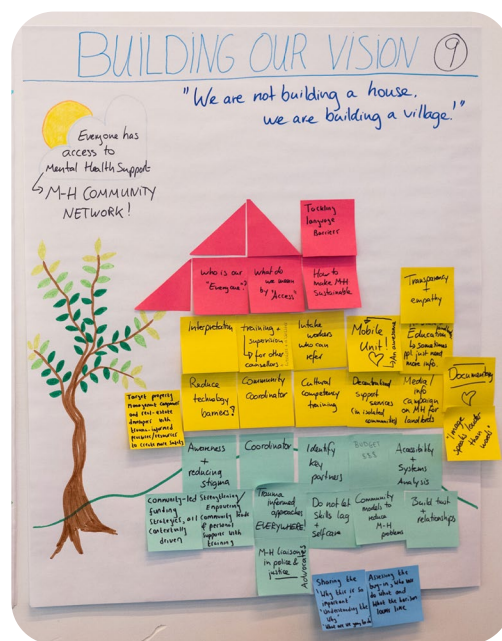
Action Plan 8: *Creating a Mental Health Community Network*

Action Plan 7: **Designing Mental Health Focused Intercultural Competence Training**
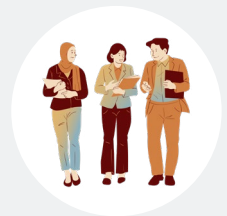
Intercultural Competence Training is an education program with a mental health focus designed to foster cultural understanding and support the integration of newcomers.

ENTRANCE (STARTING POINT)

Establish Partnerships

Establish strong partnerships among landlords, housing organizations, immigrant-serving organizations, such as the Victoria Immigrant and Refugee Centre Society (VIRCS), Inter-cultural Association of Greater Victoria (ICA) and Vancouver Island Counselling Centre for Immigrants and Refugees (VICCIR), and health providers. These partnerships will facilitate shared knowledge and resources, enabling the integration of newcomers into the community through education, cultural understanding, and mental health support.

FOUNDATION (ESTABLISHING CORE ELEMENTS)

Housing Sector Needs

Housing organizations and landlords must develop intercultural competence to effectively support diverse communities.

Newcomers & Local Needs

Newcomers should be educated on their rights and the expectations in the community, while locals must develop cultural awareness and sensitivity towards immigrants and refugees.

Collaborative Effort

The initiative will involve collaboration with cultural associations, local police, developers, and health organizations to promote understanding and reduce communication barriers.

BRICKS/WALLS/ROOMS (IMPLEMENTATION)
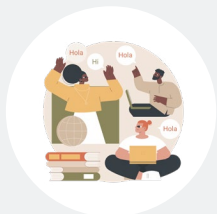
Cultural Programs and Language Classes

Develop community events, cultural programs, and language classes that promote cultural exchange, social cohesion, and reduce isolation for newcomers.

Mental Health Awareness

Key to the success of this vision is educating both locals and newcomers about mental health, cultural differences, and the mental health stressors often faced by immigrants. Mental health awareness will be integrated into all community activities.

Promoting Newcomer Contributions

Education initiatives should focus on promoting the positive contributions that newcomers make to their communities, helping to foster a sense of belonging and mutual respect.

ROOF (SUSTAINABILITY & LONG-TERM SUCCESS)

Community-Wide Engagement

Intercultural competence and mental health awareness must be recognized as shared responsibilities by everyone in the community. Locals and newcomers alike should work together to create a mentally and socially healthy environment.

Sustainability

Ensure that both mental health and intercultural competence are embedded into the community fabric through continuous education, support, and engagement. The goal is to create a sustainable and inclusive approach.

Creating a Mental Health Community Network

The Mental Health Community Network is a network that aims to raise awareness through training about the critical link between mental health, housing stability, and community support, particularly for newcomers.

## ENTRANCE (STARTING POINT)

Newcomer Buy-In

A crucial entrance point is raising awareness about the importance of mental health, particularly in the context of housing and settlement. It's essential for newcomers to understand how mental health is interconnected with housing stability, cultural adaptation, and community support.

Interest Holder Buy-In

Building buy-in from community leaders, health professionals, landlords, and government agencies is necessary for establishing a unified, collaborative approach to mental health support across the community.

FOUNDATION (ESTABLISHING CORE ELEMENTS)
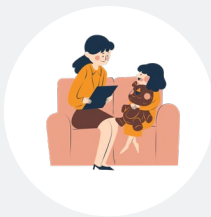
Raising Awareness

Focus on reducing the stigma surrounding mental health by providing education and promoting trauma-informed approaches to settlement.

Training Community Leaders

Empower local leaders by equipping them with the tools, training, and resources they need to act as mental health advocates within their communities.

Funding

Allocate funds for mental health programs and initiatives, ensuring that they are properly supported and sustainable.

BRICKS/WALLS/ROOMS (IMPLEMENTATION)

Accessible Mental Health Resources

Provide decentralized services, such as mobile mental health units, to ensure that services reach isolated or underserved communities. These units would bring mental health support directly to where it is needed.

Cultural Competency Mental Health Training for the Housing Sector

It's essential that landlords, property managers, and real estate developers receive training on mental health considerations and how to address the needs of diverse tenants.
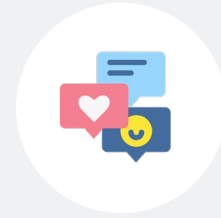
Building Communication Channels

Develop empathetic and transparent communication channels to ensure that people feel supported, heard, and understood when they seek mental health services.

ROOF (SUSTAINABILITY & LONG-TERM SUCCESS)

Equitable Access

Ensure that mental health services are available to everyone, including both newcomers and local residents, regardless of their language, cultural background, or economic status.

Long-Term Sustainability

Mental health support should be designed for long-term sustainability, ensuring that services are not reliant on temporary funding but supported by long-term public and private investments.
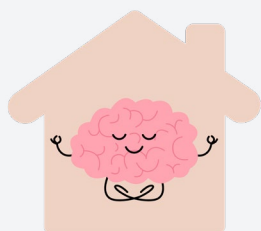
Cultural Appropriateness

To achieve equitable access, ensure that mental health services are culturally sensitive and available in multiple languages to accommodate diverse communities.

Integrating Mental Health Support with Housing Solutions

Center Mental Health: While physical health often takes precedence, mental health should be recognized as a fundamental aspect of overall well-being. The stress of housing instability, the isolation newcomers feel, and cultural misalignments must be addressed early to ensure newcomers thrive in their new homes. Holistically integrate mental and physical health within housing and settlement programs.

Mental Health support: Provide mental health professionals and community support services early in the settlement process to prevent more serious issues from developing.

Safe Spaces for Expression: Social isolation is one of the most significant contributors to mental health issues. Without the ability to connect to their new communities, newcomers are at higher risk for depression and anxiety. Establishing community spaces where newcomers can freely express their feelings and share experiences without judgment is vital for promoting emotional well-being.

Addressing Social Isolation and its Impact on Mental Health

Fear of Interaction with Landlords and Authorities

Trust-Building with Authorities: Many newcomers fear speaking up about housing problems, making noise complaints, or interacting with authorities due to concerns about cultural misunderstandings or the potential for retaliation. This can lead to suppressed mental health needs and untreated stress. Efforts to build trust with local police, housing authorities, and community leaders will help newcomers feel safer and more confident in addressing housing issues.

Intercultural Competence Training: Cultural differences, including varying expectations around noise, privacy, and communal behavior, often contribute to mental health stress. Providing education to both newcomers and locals about cultural differences—especially regarding noise levels and communal behaviors—can reduce misunderstandings and create a more harmonious living environment.

Overcoming Cultural Misunderstanding and Language Barriers

Language Accessibility: Offering mental health services in multiple languages and ensuring the availability of interpreters and cultural liaisons can improve access to care.

Culturally Competent Mental Health Professionals: Training mental health workers to be culturally aware will ensure they can provide effective support to diverse populations.

Community and Social Support Structures

Green Spaces and Parks: Creating more green spaces and playgrounds provides individuals and families with a space to relax, play, and interact, helping to reduce stress and mental health problems.

Safe Community Spaces: Public spaces should be safe, well-lit, and monitored to ensure families feel comfortable using these areas.

Community-Led Mental Health Programs: Effective mental health support for newcomers must be community-driven.

Peer Support Groups: Mental health support should not solely rely on healthcare providers or government organizations; empowering local communities to support their own mental health is equally important. Encouraging community-driven mental health initiatives allows newcomers to find support from others who understand their experiences.

Trauma-Informed Education: Community leaders, service providers, and landlords should receive training on trauma-informed care, helping them to recognize signs of distress and respond appropriately.

Empowering Local Communities to Support Mental Health
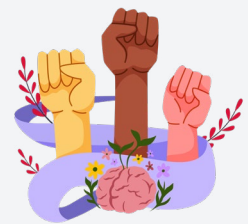
Decolonizing Mental Health Support Systems

Acknowledging Historical Trauma: A critical aspect of mental health integration for newcomers is addressing the needs of Indigenous peoples and other marginalized groups. Decolonizing mental health and community systems is vital to ensure that everyone feels welcomed and respected. Addressing the historical trauma faced by Indigenous communities can help build trust and improve access to mental health services.

Integrating Traditional Healing Practices: Mental health support should honor and incorporate Indigenous healing practices alongside modern medical approaches.

Hands-On Activities: Newcomers often experience information overload when first arriving in Canada, especially when trying to access mental health services. Traditional, text-heavy orientation sessions should be replaced with more interactive, action-oriented models. Using real-life scenarios and group discussions to help newcomers better understand mental health resources.

Interactive Workshops: Engaging newcomers in activities that build confidence in navigating mental health systems and services.

## Shifting to Action-Oriented Mental Health Support

E. Addressing CONFLICT in Housing and Community Integration

Housing-related conflicts often arise from cultural misunderstandings, differing expectations, and a lack of knowledge regarding tenant and landlord rights and responsibilities. This can create feelings of displacement and isolation among newcomers.

To address these conflicts, there needs to be a focus on education, awareness-building, and community support systems, such as housing navigators and cultural liaisons, to mediate and prevent disputes.

The following action plan explores one solution in more detail.
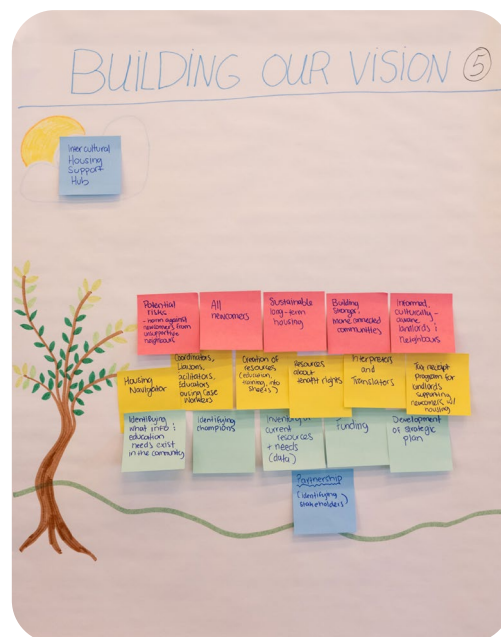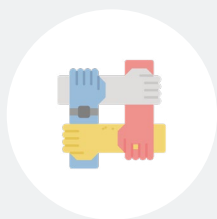

Action Plan 9: Building an Intercultural Housing Support Hub

# Action Plan 9: **Building an Intercultural Housing Support Hub**

The Intercultural Housing Support Hub is focused on building a collaborative network to support both landlords and tenants, especially newcomers, through a culturally inclusive housing system.

ENTRANCE (STARTING POINT)

Building Partnerships

The Intercultural Housing Support Hub begins with creating strong relationships among key interest holders—landlords, tenants, housing organizations, settlement agencies, and government representatives.
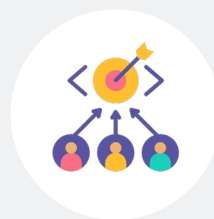
Shared Vision

Developing a comprehensive network of support for both landlords and tenants by ensuring that all interest holders are engaged in the process.

FOUNDATION (ESTABLISHING CORE ELEMENTS)

Needs Assessment

Conduct a community needs assessment to identify gaps in current housing resources and services, as well as the support needed to address cultural misunderstandings and conflict.

Strategic Plan

Develop a plan to address the identified needs, including funding, partnership development, and the creation of culturally sensitive training programs.

BRICKS/WALLS/ROOMS (IMPLEMENTATION)

Housing Navigators and Cultural Liaisons

These roles are essential for supporting newcomers in securing housing, understanding their rights, and accessing mental health resources.

Educational Materials

Develop and distribute culturally appropriate resources such as tenant rights guides, information sheets, and training materials available in multiple languages to ensure accessibility for all.
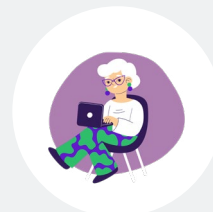
Incentive Programs

Introduce programs, such as a tax receipt program for landlords who support newcomers, to incentivize responsible and inclusive rental practices.

ROOF (SUSTAINABILITY & LONG-TERM SUCCESS)

Long-Term Support

Address housing challenges and risks that newcomers face, such as discrimination and lack of support, by ensuring the system is sustainable and continues to evolve to meet community needs.
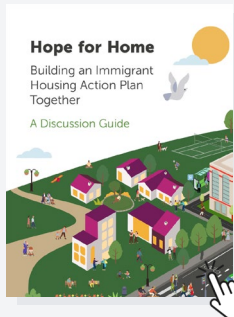
Inclusive Education

Ongoing cultural competency training for landlords and neighbors is critical to fostering peaceful coexistence and preventing discrimination.

Landlord Cultural Training and Mandatory Certification

Training Programs: Implement cultural training programs for landlords, such as Rent it Right for Landlords, to educate them on managing culturally diverse tenants. Topics should include conflict resolution, cultural sensitivity (e.g., noise levels, religious practices), and tenant rights and responsibilities.

Noise Sensitivity Education: Noise tolerance is often an overlooked factor in mental health and community integration. Newcomers may feel stressed by different noise expectations, which can contribute to feelings of anxiety. Both newcomers and locals should be educated about cultural differences in noise expectations.

Certification Requirement: Mandate certification for landlords, ensuring a basic level of competency in managing tenant relations, conflict resolution, and cultural understanding.

Interactive Resource: Expand and use the *Hope for Home guide* (https://bit.ly/hopeforhome-guide) as a training tool for both tenants and landlords. This guide, with its interactive elements, can help address common housing issues and foster communication about cultural expectations and rights.

Initiatives for Social Cohesion: Community-building activities such as dinners, social events, or community gardens can promote integration and prevent conflict by creating spaces for mutual understanding and trust-building.

Creating Designated Safe Spaces: For example, creating spaces where children can play without causing stress for others, and educating the community on the importance of tolerating everyday noise, helps reduce tension and fosters a stronger sense of community.

Sense of Belonging: When newcomers feel connected to their neighborhood, they are less likely to experience isolation or conflicts. These activities also offer an opportunity for people to share their concerns and experiences in a non-confrontational environment.

Community Building as Conflict Prevention

Housing Navigators and Cultural Liaisons

Role of Housing Navigators: Housing navigators play a critical role in guiding newcomers through the housing system. They assist with securing housing, understanding rights, negotiating with landlords, and resolving disputes. Navigators can also connect newcomers with essential resources like tenant insurance and security deposits.

Cultural Housing Liaisons: These individuals would serve as intermediaries between tenants and landlords, ensuring that cultural differences are respected and helping to resolve disputes through culturally sensitive approaches.

Housing Champions: Advocates who ensure that immigrants and refugees are supported throughout their housing journey, from finding accommodation to resolving disputes. Housing champions also work to bridge the gap between landlords and tenants, preventing disputes from escalating into formal conflicts.

Housing Champions and Advocacy

CALL TO ACTION

The Hope for Home event and this report mark not an end, but a vital turning point in our collective pursuit of housing justice for immigrants and refugees on Vancouver Island.

This document, woven from the threads of collaborative dialogue, shared concerns, and innovative thinking, represents a crucial step forward in addressing the complex and interconnected challenges facing newcomers seeking to establish roots in our community. The discussions laid bare the multifaceted dimensions of this issue, from the systemic barriers that perpetuate housing insecurity to the deeply personal struggles of individuals and families navigating a new and often unfamiliar landscape.

What this report confirms is that housing solutions cannot be developed in isolation, but must be done in community partnership and integrated with broader efforts to address employment, language acquisition, mental health, and social integration.

The "house" metaphor, which has served as a guiding framework throughout this document, provides a powerful visual representation of the essential components of a robust and equitable housing action plan. A house is not simply a shelter, but a foundation for belonging, a place where cultural identity is respected and nurtured, and a springboard for future success.

Now, the time has come to move beyond planning and into action. We extend an invitation to a broad spectrum of interest holders, recognizing that each brings unique strengths and perspectives to this collective endeavor.

The journey ahead will not be easy, but we are confident that by working together, by harnessing the collective energy and expertise of our communities, and by remaining steadfast in our commitment to equity and inclusion, we can build a place where every resident, regardless of their background or origin, has the opportunity to thrive in a safe, affordable, and culturally appropriate home.

Please join us in this call to action which is a testament to our shared belief in the power of community to create a better future for all. We eagerly anticipate the partnerships, the collaborations, and the collective action that will transform these aspirations into reality.

In Gratitude

The Greater Victoria Local Immigration Partnership (GVLIP) is proud to have played a central role in supporting this event and contributing to this important document. The **GVLIP Housing Sector Table** is a vital part of this effort and includes organizations and individuals committed to addressing the complex housing challenges facing newcomers. Together, we identify barriers, share knowledge and resources, and co-create solutions that support accessible and equitable housing for immigrants in Greater Victoria.

We are deeply grateful to the **Government of Canada** through **Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)** for their financial support, which enables us to carry out this work and foster meaningful partnerships that strengthen our community.

To Immigrant Individuals and Families: Your voices and lived experiences are at the heart of this plan. We invite you to share your stories, to participate in community conversations, and to advocate for policies that reflect your needs and aspirations. Your insights into the challenges you face in navigating the housing system, your understanding of the cultural factors that impact your housing choices, and your vision for a more equitable future are invaluable. We encourage you to connect with community organizations, to access available resources, and to become active participants in shaping the future of housing on Vancouver Island.

To Government Agencies: Your leadership and commitment to policy change are crucial. We urge you to review and revise existing housing policies to ensure that they are inclusive of the diverse needs of immigrant and refugee families. We call on you to invest in the development of affordable housing options, to support the creation of wrap-around support services, and to champion initiatives that promote social integration and cultural understanding. Your role in securing funding, streamlining bureaucratic processes, and fostering collaboration across different levels of government is vital to the long-term sustainability of this plan.

To Landlords and Developers: Your participation in creating a more equitable housing market is essential. We invite you to consider innovative approaches to rental agreements, to embrace culturally sensitive property management practices, and to explore the development of housing options that meet the diverse needs of newcomer families. We encourage you to participate in cultural competency training programs, to partner with community organizations in supporting newcomer tenants, and to recognize the valuable contributions that immigrants and refugees make to our communities. Your willingness to adapt and innovate will play a significant role in creating a more inclusive and welcoming housing landscape.

To Immigrant Serving Community Organizations: Your expertise in serving immigrant and refugee populations is invaluable. We invite you to partner with us in developing and implementing culturally appropriate programs and services that address the specific needs of newcomers. Your experience in navigating the complexities of the housing system, your understanding of the cultural nuances that can impact housing stability, and your established relationships with newcomer communities are essential to the success of this plan. We encourage you to share your insights, participate in community conversations, and collaborate with us in designing and delivering innovative housing solutions.

To All Residents of Vancouver Island: Your support and understanding are essential to creating a truly welcoming community for newcomers. We encourage you to learn more about the challenges faced by immigrants and refugees, to embrace opportunities for intercultural exchange, and to challenge prejudice and discrimination wherever you encounter it. Your willingness to extend a friendship, to offer support and guidance, and to create a sense of belonging for newcomers will contribute immeasurably to the success of this plan and the vibrancy of our community.

The Greater Victoria Local Immigration Partnership (GVLIP) invites you to join our Housing Sector Table—a collaborative space where partners come together to address the housing needs of immigrants, refugees, and newcomers in our region.

Contact Us to Get Involved

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GVLIP Coordinator
Email: **hkontomyrova@icavictoria.org**

Published in **2025**