

Response from
*the Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance / alliance canadienne du
secteur de l'établissement des immigrants (CISSA-ACSEI) to*

***Reconfiguring Settlement and Integration:
A Service Provider Strategy for Innovation and Results.***

An independent research report by Meyer Burstein, commissioned by CISSA-ACSEI.

July 26, 2010

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From submissions by CISSA-ACSEI member associations:

Atlantic Region Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies (ARAIISA)
Manitoba Immigrant and Refugee Settlement Sector Association (MIRSSA)
Saskatchewan Association of Immigrant Settlement and Integration Agencies (SAISIA)
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Introduction

The provincial / regional member associations of the *Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance / alliance canadienne du secteur de l'établissement des immigrants (CISSA-ACSEI)* are pleased to release this important research report developed by Meyer Burstein to inform the established Canadian not-for-profit immigrant settlement sector, and its government and community partners, as our country moves into a new phase in immigrant and refugee settlement and integration. CISSA-ACSEI commissioned ***Reconfiguring Settlement and Integration: A Service Provider Strategy for Innovation and Results*** to clarify the quickly changing dynamics for service provision faced by immigrant settlement organizations.

The not-for-profit organizations which are represented by CISSA-ACSEI's member "umbrella" associations have been assisting newcomers for many years – most were established in the 1970s, some even earlier. Over the last decade CISSA-ACSEI's members have adapted to significantly increased attention to, and funding for, the reception and integration of immigrants, refugees, and other migrant groups. Canada's increasing focus on getting immigrants more quickly and effectively settled and attached to the labour market is welcomed by the established immigrant settlement sector. But this increased attention and funding brings with it many changes to the immigrant service environment: private sector and government focus on effective immigrant outcomes, quickly increasing numbers and types of service and providers, and new types of migration including temporary categories not eligible for most settlement services.

This CISSA-ACSEI response to the ***Reconfiguring Settlement and Integration*** research report (hereafter referred to as "the report") was compiled from input provided by CISSA-ACSEI member immigrant service organization staff across Canada. The topic areas through which CISSA-ACSEI's response is presented below do not match the report's framework or table of contents, but do reflect what CISSA-ACSEI members saw as important themes in the report's discussions and recommendations.

Importance of the Report

CISSA-ACSEI member umbrella organizations are united in finding this research report to be a thorough and accurate depiction of the current situation as well as an insightful forecast of the future challenges and opportunities facing the sector. CISSA-ACSEI members are now informing upcoming provincial conferences and strategic planning processes with the report's research and recommendations, and are reviewing the findings with their key provincial / regional service funders.

"This document provides us with a basis in which to engage in meaningful discussions with one another as well as with our funders and we look forward to strategizing on how best to

use this to move forward to address some of the challenges we are currently facing. Coordinating our actions with others across the country will help to ensure maximum effectiveness.” *CISSA-ACSEI member umbrella organization.*

CISSA-ACSEI notes that while the report gives a broad and accurate national perspective, there are significant variations between provinces and regions which cannot be accounted in a report of this nature: different client dynamics and concentrations, varying governmental roles and “devolution” models, disparate economic situations, and different arrays of service funders and stakeholders. CISSA-ACSEI members nonetheless appreciate and concur with the report’s over-arching description of our dilemma: *We inherently know much about our effectiveness that we do not have the resources to quantify or analyze, and we do not have the resources to tell our story.*

Citizenship and Immigration Canada and Other Government Funders.

The report gives the impression that Citizenship and Immigration Canada is the only major player in the design and funding of immigrant services. CISSA-ACSEI members note that many provincial ministries allocate significant funding to and develop distinct immigrant settlement programming. BC, Manitoba and Quebec governments all design, fund and administer their own distinct set of immigrant settlement services through devolution agreements. In addition, some immigrant serving agencies receive significant funding from other sources: federal ministries, crown corporations, municipalities, and foundations.

CISSA-ACSEI members also note that while for some agencies and provinces there are numerous major service funders, in other provinces the bulk of funding and service capacity comes from one source and additional sources only add marginal service capacity. Levels of “independence” from primary immigrant service funders are variable – one CISSA-ACSEI member agency noted for their provincial immigration ministry (with full settlement service devolution): *“Every one of us would have to close our doors if we were to depend on “other funders””*.

The settlement umbrella organization for another province notes that their federal settlement allocation is still delivered by CIC. Total CIC funding in that province totals \$25.6 million of an estimated provincial settlement agency funding total of \$51.2 million – nearly half of that province’s settlement sector funding is from “alternate sources”. Some individual agencies in that province receive less than 30 percent of their total funding from the federal settlement allocation.

While CIC is a core government player in immigrant settlement, other federal and provincial governmental bodies (eg: health, economic development, children and families) play important parallel roles in some provinces, as do some municipalities. The report’s recommendations should be equally considered by other relevant governmental funding bodies, and CIC should recognize that it is not the only major immigrant settlement stakeholder within government in Canada. In recognition of this fact, CISSA-ACSEI is planning to disseminate this report to, and to review it with, all important service funders in each province. It is CISSA-ACSEI’s hope that this report will encourage all the major immigrant service policy makers, service designers, and service funders to work together more closely to align services and organizational supports.

Funding Dynamics – CIC Contribution Agreements and Other Funding Models.

The report labels the CIC settlement service *Contribution Agreement* regime as “fee-for-service”, which for CISSA-ACSEI members who hold CIC contracts is a confusing description. A true fee-for-service (purchase) model would be more mutual and equitable in nature than the current line-by-line monitoring of the CIC Contribution Agreement structure. The settlement sector as represented by CISSA-ACSEI is seeking funding models that reflects its maturity and complexity as businesses – even if this means a straight contracting or purchasing model. While these models do not allow immigrant serving organizations to claim the integrative and cross-sectoral and leadership work that we do as agencies, at least they allow us to generate our own revenue to support those aspects of our mission.

Again, CISSA-ACSEI notes that in provincial jurisdictions where settlement programming design and contracting are fully devolved (BC, Manitoba, Quebec), there are very different funding models. Other departments, ministries and non-governmental funders also provide alternatives to the CIC Contribution Agreement model.

Independent Sector Research Capacities

The research model presented in the report is of great potential benefit to service providers as well as service funders, but will not meet the national immigrant service sector’s goals unless Canada’s community-based immigrant serving organizations have substantial control of research funding and research, and have an equitable relationship with academia. The immigrant serving sector has learned this through experience with Metropolis, which was limited in conducting research of direct relevance to frontline service delivery due to funder requirements and research selection processes - although some valuable work has come through the Metropolis centres, the bulk of it does not directly inform settlement policy or practice. Research capacity should be sector-directed and inter-related, not just “one-off” or esoteric research on topics pre-determined by funders and academia.

In making these statements, CISSA-ACSEI recognizes that it could not achieve effective and legitimate research without integrating the roles and expertise of independent academia and government staff. The report’s model for a new sector-led research institution is a good and appropriate one in that respect.

It will be very important for the proposed Pan-Canadian settlement sector research body to have the mandate and capacity to analyze and comment on all policies and funding practices related to immigrant settlement. Front-line service delivery is fundamentally affected by policy and funding, so to be effective the research body would need to focus on any of / all of policy, funding and practice to reach findings of value.

CISSA-ACSEI confirms the need for this social service sector to develop strategic capacities. The challenge will be to develop a framework and funding that is balanced and sustainable. Achieving this will require some new approaches by the sector, including securing participation by all relevant government bodies (eg: CIC, Health Canada, HRSDC, provincial immigration ministries, other provincial ministries, crown corporations, municipalities) and non-government funding sources (business

associations, foundations, advocacy bodies). If the Canadian not-for-profit settlement sector does not develop this capacity, it risks being eclipsed by established research institutions which are now increasingly branching into direct immigrant service delivery (eg: colleges, universities, chambers of commerce).

The report does not include one other important role for the envisioned research capacities – that of making research processes and outcomes easily accessible to frontline immigrant service providers. That role should be seen as core to a sector-led research body, and should be a role that “comes naturally” to a body that is not primarily led by independent academia, but by those actually working with newcomers in communities.

Innovation: Identifying “Best” Policies and Practices

There is a great need for targeted intellectual and analytic capacity regarding immigrant service delivery, given population and immigration projections for Canada. The established immigrant serving sector holds over thirty years of direct experience in designing and delivering services – in particular because of strong client relationships we are in a unique position to play a leading research role in collaboration with government and academia.

The Canadian immigrant settlement sector is still recent in its establishment relative to most other social serving sectors, hence is still at a relatively early stage in developing service models. On top of that, immigrant populations’ characteristics and service needs are highly diverse. Given the social and economic importance of effective and speedy immigrant settlement, the report is absolutely correct in identifying much potential benefit from concerted research into what constitute effective policies and practices for each settlement service situation.

This research must though be approached with nuance and balance. CISSA-ACSEI also emphasizes that identifying “best” policies and practices is a topic that requires context – there may be no “best” approach for either policy or practice that applies in each case for immigrant populations across Canada. This research can be completed - effective models can be identified for various groups and issues – but any research on this topic must clearly account for the variables that affect any policy or practice example, and should avoid any absolute statements about any one policy or practice model being “best”. Labelling programs and policies with sweeping labels such as “best” allows stakeholders (eg: politicians, business leaders, service providers) to oversimplify findings and inaccurately represent isolated services as ultimate panaceas when they are not.

CISSA-ACSEI members also note that the drive for “innovation” is by definition about doing something new, and can under-represent the value of service models that immigrant serving agencies have developed through their long service histories. The report rightly notes that established settlement service providers may not have the capacities to participate in processes of innovation. Achieving innovation and seeking sustainability are not necessarily the same thing – in fact they can be at odds with one another as service innovation can be costly, risky, and not well-funded. Some funders have the habit of funding innovative approaches through new players in immigrant settlement, rather than identifying that innovation can come through long-established

settlement service providers. The identification of effective policies and practice must necessarily include analysis of current as well as previous service models, and should not presume that newer developments are de-facto superior.

Identifying and Improving Immigrant Settlement Outcomes

Government for clear and valid reasons is increasingly interested in outcomes for money spent. This is an “Achille’s heel” for the Canadian settlement sector – it is very hard to isolate and ascribe settlement service outcomes given all the variables affecting newcomers’ settlement and integration. Doing so would require sustained expansive new capacities, and likely would also necessitate greater collaboration regionally and nationally between settlement service providers. CISSA-ACSEI concurs that the established immigrant settlement sector can gain independence and increased legitimacy by developing effective collective capacities to identify and attribute outcomes from delivered services.

CISSA-ACSEI is concerned that, because broad indications are that immigrants are experiencing declining economic and social settlement outcomes in recent years, it is becoming an accepted truth that the current immigrant settlement service model necessarily needs major change. It is of the utmost importance that broader societal and economic factors affecting immigrants are recognized for the roles they play limiting immigrant outcomes, and that the quest for more effective outcomes look at addressing both direct services and broader factors.

The report also mentions another emerging immigrant service trend, which CISSA-ACSEI members view as important to further highlight. There is an increasing array of public sector and for-profit service providers in settlement, providing targeted service interventions based on their specializations. Not-for-profit settlement agencies tend to provide a “holistic” set of services, and hence the more complex, interdisciplinary and difficult client situations are still referred to settlement agencies. If public and private providers continue to serve primarily immigrants with minimal settlement and employment barriers, and immigrant serving agencies continue to serve whichever immigrants come seeking help, this will of course increase the cost per service and lessen aggregate service outcomes for not-for-profit agencies, and thus the year-to-year as well as sector-to-sector comparisons will appear increasingly unfavourable.

Who Does What Well?

In drawing the distinction between what the sector does best and what others do best, the report suggests that the not-for-profit sector provides superior settlement information and referral services and that other types of public or quasi-public service deliverers (eg: colleges, universities) may deliver employment and advanced language training best. CISSA-ACSEI members note that in most Canadian communities *employment services for newcomers are better delivered by immigrant serving agencies*, although there is recognition that colleges in some (though not all) cases do have institutional advantages in advanced language delivery. The description of client needs and sector capacity (p23-24 3rd paragraph in the Essential Capacities section) exactly

describes client needs and agency responses with culturally competent employment services, and the limitation of government, quasi-government and private sector services for employment as well as settlement.

Standardized Client Assessment

The report recommends that implementation of a shared initial client assessment tool be investigated. This idea reflects models previously considered in some provinces, but the model has not been implemented for various reasons. To do this will take much collaborative development by the immigrant settlement sector on the regional and scales, but it could be a great “step forward” for the settlement sector’s collective service capacities and professionalism.

Temporary Foreign Workers

The situations of Temporary Foreign Workers (TFWs) in Canadian communities may be best understood by immigrant serving agencies, to which TFWs come on a daily basis hoping for help and guidance. CISSA-ACSEI members are united in supporting the report’s recommendation to investigate impacts of the current situation, and potential new service models for TFWs. For some provinces and communities the issues facing TFWs are of the highest importance, and all CISSA-ACSEI members concur with the report’s recommendations regarding TFWs.

Valuing Immigrant Serving Sector Expertise

CISSA-ACSEI members agree strongly with the development of a model that values and recompenses the immigrant serving sector for providing its unique knowledge and expertise. We have been providing our expertise “for free” for years, in some cases to eventual service competitors. A good starting point would be for CISSA-ACSEI to identify where models of this nature are developed in other specialized social serving sectors (eg: aboriginal, women), and to replicate the model for the dynamics of the immigrant settlement service sector.

Sector Cohesiveness

The current state of the national immigrant settlement sector does not allow government to have a clear, unified point of contact in developing policy and practice. CISSA-ACSEI is concerned how this fact impacts government’s perspectives about and directions for working with the sector. That the settlement service umbrella organizations for both Ontario and Quebec have chosen not to be members of CISSA-ACSEI is a high-profile example of the gaps in national unity within the settlement service sector, and may limit our ability to attain collective goals such as those laid out in the report.

In addition, the evolution of funding models for “taxpayer accountability” (eg: CIC Contribution Agreements, BC Open Tendering) can lead to greater competition between immigrant serving organizations just at the time we are being called upon to

increase collaboration to benefit client outcomes. Increased competition for funding could erode sector abilities to collaborate, and in particular could hamper the achievement of many of this report's recommendations (eg: knowledge development, collective research capacities, unified external communications).

CISSA-ACSEI was formed to bring together a national network of immigrant serving providers, and CISSA-ACSEI members are pleased to have this venue to work together. While our membership may not be complete at this time, CISSA-ACSEI will work to overcome inter-agency and inter-provincial competitive strains, and will remain engaged as best possible with other key national players to move forward on national issues such as those identified in the report.

The Recommendations

The value of this report to CISSA-ACSEI members and other long-established not-for-profit immigrant service providers is clear. CISSA-ACSEI members without exception perceive the report's observations and recommendations to be insightful, timely and important. *There are some report recommendations that are resonant to CISSA-ACSEI members across Canada:*

- Developing a national independent, sector-led research organization is a recommendation area with much merit, especially given Metropolis will not play that role much longer and wasn't able to maintain focus on policy and frontline practice – *Rec's #1, #2 & #4.*
- Developing more capacity to identify best practices and attribute settlement service outcomes is an area of great potential value to all Canadian stakeholders in immigration, and is long overdue for this service sector – *Rec #1, #2, #3 & #4.*
- Looking into developing shared tools and service models to better serve immigrant clients is a step the sector can take toward increased professionalization of service delivery – *Rec's #6 & #7.*
- Developing frameworks to better value settlement sector expertise, and to identify where not-for-profit settlement agencies hold service provision advantages, are recommendations that are in a sense "self-serving" to the sector. But implementation of these recommendations would actually bring broader benefits as not-for-profit immigrant serving agencies are better understood and better supported to share their unique expertise and community knowledge – *Rec's #5, #8 & #10.*
- Understanding the ramifications of established not-for-profit immigrant serving agencies serving an increasing proportion of clients with multiple barriers (eg: other types of providers serving clients with easier-to-achieve outcomes) is a very forward-looking recommendation, and CISSA-ACSEI recognizes that it is urgent that we prepare for such changing service dynamics – *Rec #9.*
- Researching potential service models to better support Temporary Foreign Workers in Canadian communities is not an idea new to CISSA-ACSEI – we have been recommending this to federal and provincial governments for several years –

but the report provides a new more formal approach for engaging on this topic – *Rec #12.*

- Researching the many new settlement service pilots recently developed across Canada is an opportunity which should be acted on soon. Now is a rare time of expansion, innovation and specialization in the Canadian immigrant settlement sector, and we must ensure we learn everything we can before program models are abandoned for funding or other reasons not related to their effectiveness – *Rec #15.*

Others of the report's recommendations are of more or less urgency to CISSA-ACSEI members, depending upon the provinces and communities in which they serve, and which are their primary funders:

- Revising CIC's Contribution Agreement model to better balance financial accountability and service outcomes (Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations) is most directly relevant to CISSA-ACSEI members in Alberta, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island where CIC is still the main settlement service contractor. CISSA-ACSEI members in BC and Manitoba recognize that implementation of the Blue Ribbon Panel recommendations would also have ramifications in their provinces - *Rec #3.*
- Strengthening connections with ethno-specific organizations has very different meanings in different provinces and communities, as the ranges, natures and roles of ethno-specific organizations vary widely between locations – *Rec #11.*
- Continuing efforts to identify ways to attract newcomers to smaller centres, and researching alternative service models for currently under-served communities which do or want to attract newcomers, are topics that are of high interest to certain provinces and communities for fairly obvious reasons. Much has been done already regarding “regional dispersion”, and CISSA-ACSEI members want to build on what has been already achieved on this topic – *Rec #14.*
- Research into services for immigrants who have been in Canada for an extended period, and who may have achieved citizenship, was not a recommendation that received a lot of CISSA-ACSEI members' response. This is likely because this is an issue that varies in importance between provinces and communities, depending upon what other services are available for this group of “established” immigrants – *Rec #13.*

*Enquiries to CISSA-ACSEI regarding the **Reconfiguring Settlement and Integration** report, or about this response, please contact:*

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