Inclusive Communities for Older Immigrants (ICOI) Partnership

Developing multi-level, multi-component interventions to reduce social isolation and promote connectedness among older immigrants in Canada

Greetings

Dear ICOI team members:

Greetings as we end the summer season!

We are moving forward with data collection activities, and this newsletter includes more information about the progress.

As in past ICOI newsletters, this issue introduces more ICOI team members. The issue also includes a summary of the quantitative data collected, an update on the coding of the individual interviews, and the participant observation activity.

We are grateful for your contributions to the project so far and look forward to moving the project forward with you. Please stay in touch.

Warmest regards,
Sepali Guruge, ICOI Project Director
Kaveenaa Chandrasekaran, ICOI Project Manager

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

ICOI Team Member Greetings

Xueping Ma, Project Coordinator, QC Team

Xueping (Marsha) is a clinical social worker in a home care program and a hospital setting in Montreal, Quebec. In these roles, Marsha conducts needs assessments, service planning, advocacy, and collaboration with others. Marsha supports immigrants and refugees in Montreal and provides free psychosocial counselling for the Ukraine Aid Initiative. Her lifelong passion is advocating for vulnerable groups in our society, especially special needs children and older adults.

Prince Ekoh, Provincial Coordinator, AB Team

Prince is a doctoral candidate and sessional lecturer in Social Work at University of Calgary, as well as a teaching fellow at University of Nigeria, where he also has a master's degree in Social Work. He also holds a master's degree in Gerontology from University of Southampton. Supported by the Vanier Canada Graduate Scholarship, the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Foundation Scholarship, and the Alberta Association on Gerontology, his research under Dr. Walsh focuses on the social networks and support experiences of older African refugees.

Sherry Wang, Research Assistant, BC Team

Sherry holds a Master of Arts in Youth, Children, and Family Ministry and works as a Community Research Liaison on projects focused on Chinese immigrants. She serves as a Board Director for Archway Community Services' Refugees and Immigrants Advisory Table, addressing the needs of newcomers. She provides medical and legal interpretation services for provincial language services. Sherry is also an executive producer for Seek and Find Lodge, a children's media production, and is a Pastor at the Surrey Chinese Church of the Nazarene.

Ming Cheng, Research Assistant, ON Team
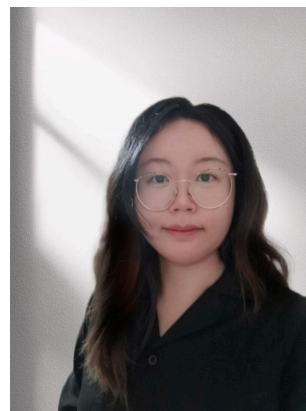
Ming is a master's student in Education Studies at Western University, specializing in Critical Policy, Equity, and Leadership Studies. Since 2022, Ming has been involved in the ICOI project work including all three data collection activities for Phase 1 and community outreach. Through this work, Ming has gained a hands-on perspective on the systemic and individual challenges affecting older adults of racialized immigrant communities. Ming is also studying the challenges visiting Chinese doctoral students experience at Canadian universities.

Peiwen Lin, Research Assistant, ON Team

Peiwen obtained her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Toronto Metropolitan University and is a full-time registered nurse at St. Michael's Hospital, a Level-One Trauma Centre in the Greater Toronto Area. She delivers compassionate nursing care to acutely ill patients, integrating her unwavering commitment to humanistic care with a strong passion for ongoing professional growth. As a member of the Toronto team, Peiwen engages with community partners to support the ICOI project while strengthening her research capacities in a number of fields.

Madison Wilson, Provincial Coordinator, BC Team

Madison has been the Project Coordinator for the British Columbia partners of the ICOI project for two years, working alongside the leads in Victoria and Vancouver. She serves as an occupational therapist in both public and private healthcare sectors. Her role with ICOI, combined with work in occupational therapy, reflects her passion for connecting with people where they are and enhancing their environments to help them achieve their goals and meet their needs.

Ka Wai Wong, Research Assistant, AB Team
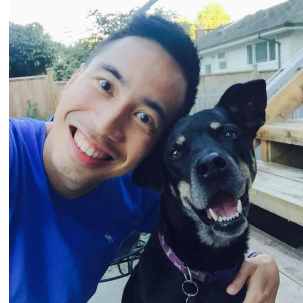
Ka Wai (Sam) is a Registered Social Worker with over 10 years of experience specializing in culturally sensitive, trauma-informed care across communities and healthcare settings. At Alberta Health Services, he provides clinical support in pediatric, adolescent, and adult psychiatry, focusing on crisis intervention, grief, palliation, and chronic health conditions. Sam holds a Master of Social Work from University of Waterloo and a Bachelor of Social Work from University of Calgary, where he was awarded the PURE Award. A dedicated volunteer, he offers pet therapy with the Community Therapy Dogs Society, and has served as a crisis line volunteer. He is fluent in English, Cantonese, and Mandarin, and is trained in various therapeutic interventions, including "It's Not Right!" older adults abuse prevention and trauma-focused intervention skills.

ICOI Phase 1 Data Collection Activities: Progress to Date

Quantitative Surveys

A brief report by Prof. Souraya Sidani:

In collaboration with our partners, we enrolled 647 older immigrants across 9 cities: Montréal and Gatineau in Québec; Toronto, London, and Hamilton in Ontario; Edmonton and Calgary in Alberta; and Vancouver and Victoria in British Columbia.

We focused on four categories of factors that we identified in the literature as contributing to older immigrants' social isolation:

1. Socio-demographic factors, such as, age, gender, education, ethnicity and financial situation;
2. Health factors, such as, perceptions of physical health, level of function, and mental health;
3. Social factors, such as, size of the social network, availability of social support, quality of interactions with others, and sense of belonging to the community; and
4. Environmental factors, such as, neighborhood safety, accessibility to transportation, availability of support services, and experiences of discrimination.

We measured social isolation by assessing feelings of loneliness and involvement in social activities (e.g., reading newspapers, going on day trips) as well as engagement in community activities (e.g., meetings with family and friends, participating in educational or leisure events).

We analyzed the relationships between these factors and social isolation using multiple regression.

The results show that:

- Older immigrants with high educational qualifications engaged in a large number of social and community activities.
- Arabic-speaking older immigrants reported low levels of loneliness but participated in a small number of community activities.
- Older immigrants who rated their physical health as good-to-excellent felt lonely but engaged in a large number of social and community activities.
- Older immigrants experiencing depression were lonely and participated in a small number of social activities.
- Older immigrants with a large number of friends reported low levels of loneliness and participated in a large number of community activities.
- Older immigrants who use technology to stay connected with others, engaged in a large number of social and community activities.
- Frequent contacts with the local community were associated with reduced feelings of loneliness and participation in a large number of community activities.
- Older immigrants who recently (in the past few years) visited their home country engaged in a large number of social and community activities.

Individual Qualitative Interviews

In collaboration with our community partners, the ICOI research assistants across the study sites interviewed 207 immigrant older adults. In June 2024, we conducted bi-weekly Nvivo training sessions for five research assistants (at least one research assistant from each province). They are currently participating in coding of the individual interview data. The Nvivo training sessions were facilitated by a PhD student from University of Victoria. These sessions were conducted via Zoom, recorded, and made accessible to the trainees.

Research Ethics Board Approval for Participant Observation

In March 2024, we received TMU research ethics board approval to conduct participant observation activities. We were able to secure research ethics board approval at all other academic partner institutions by the end of August 2024. From August to October, we will be conducting bi-weekly (virtual) training sessions for our research assistants who will be hired to engage in participant recruitment and participant observation data collection in the Fall. The goal is to complete this phase of data collection by November 2024. Check for updates in the Fall 2024 newsletter.

Looking Ahead: 2025 ICOI Summit

The last ICOI Summit took place in April 2023 at University of Calgary, where community and academic team members gathered (in person and virtually) to discuss the project work, progress, and plans. We are excited to announce that planning for the 2025 ICOI Summit is underway. It will be held in March 2025 in Montreal, Quebec. We will provide updates when the exact dates are finalized.

Inside the Next Issue

The next ICOI newsletter will introduce more ICOI team members, share news about PO data collection, and provide further project activity updates.

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada — Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada — Canada

The Inclusive Communities for Older Immigrants is a 8-year Partnership.

Please share this newsletter with your networks

Management/Editorial Team

Sepali Guruge, Project Director

Kaveenaa Chandrasekaran, Project Manager