



## **CISSA-ACSEI 2017 Pre Budget Consultation – October 3, 2016**

### **Introduction:**

The Canadian Immigrant Settlement Sector Alliance- Alliance canadienne du secteur de l'établissement des immigrants (CISSA-ACSEI) is a pan-Canadian Association which represents the immigrant settlement sector in Canada including bringing the sector's expertise to bear on public policies and programs for enhancing the settlement and integration of immigrants and refugees. CISSA-ACSEI's membership, consisting of provincial and regional umbrella associations, represents over 400 immigrant and refugee serving agencies across Canada. CISSA-ACSEI is uniquely positioned to provide specialized expertise regarding services to successfully settle and integrate immigrants into Canadian society, and a national perspective on the 2017 pre Budget consultations.

Immigration and settlement programming has a direct impact on the well-being of the Canadian economy. Canada is facing significant labour market shortages, an aging population and declining birthrate. There is also a critical need to attract and retain immigrants to smaller centres across Canada. In some parts of the country such as in Atlantic Canada some provinces have instituted population growth strategies largely driven by higher immigration levels.

The national settlement budget allocation directly correlates to our ability as a country to successfully integrate newcomers on both an economic and social basis. The Government of Canada has recently indicated their desire to introduce a multi-year immigration plan with higher immigration levels for economic, family and humanitarian classes. We are concerned that with the likelihood of higher immigration levels over the next few years the current national settlement budget does not even meet present needs across the country. While our membership supports the recent Syrian refugee resettlement initiative it has brought to the forefront several settlement related program challenges across Canada.

### **Language Program Needs:**

The ability to effectively speak one of Canada's official languages is key to social cohesion and integration including labour market attachment. The Federal Government funded language program – Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) classes currently have wait-lists in most regions of Canada. The Province of British Columbia and Alberta, for example, have wait-lists of 5,000 and 4,400 spaces respectively. These wait-list numbers do not take into consideration child care spaces.

Child care make it possible for immigrant and refugee mothers to attend language classes. Having newly arrived immigrants and refugees waiting for months, sometimes over a year for language classes is unacceptable -- a waste of human capital and creates unnecessary delays in their integration process.

### **Labour Market attachment and Employment related supports:**

One of the immediate desires that most newly arrived immigrants and refugees have is their interest to work and contribute to Canada. While the lack of adequate language programs hinders their ability to attach to the labour market and/or reach their full capacity there is also a greater need for specifically designed training and employment programs for both high and low skilled newcomers. The current Canada Job Strategy approach is not meeting the unique needs of newcomers to Canada. Previous models such as project based training which offered specific occupational language support, skills training, paid work experience/ placement (wage subsidies) would contribute more to the economic integration of newcomers than many of the existing approaches. Additional funding to support newcomer work place retention, soft skills training, skills enhancement funds, support for alternative career pathways, employer engagement type programming would greatly enhance our ability to support the economic integration of newcomers.

### **Humanitarian Immigration – need for additional specialized supports:**

Since the significant overhaul of Canada's Immigration Act in June 2002 (the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act -IRPA), Canada has selected government assisted refugees through the use of vulnerability criteria including the urgent need for protection. We support this and past governments' selection process however we have an obligation to adequately support resettled refugees under humanitarian immigration objectives. Since 2002 the characteristics of government assisted refugees has changed significantly. We are now seeing refugees who have spent sometimes decades in protracted refugee situations, low literacy, large size families, survivors of torture and various other special need cases. There are six (6) areas that we would like to highlight for additional budget consideration.

- Transportation Loan program – the interest bearing transportation loan (the only country that issues interest bearing loan) that covers the one way transportation and overseas medical examination should be terminated for all government assisted refugees not just for Syrians;
- Funding for a national settlement informed refugee trauma support program. Due to significant trauma and pre-existing mental health conditions associated with migration we urgently need funding for short-

- term, time limited first language clinical counselling programs as part of the current resettlement assistance program budget. We look to successful models such as in Australia that have been funded for years by the federal government as an integral part of settlement programming not through the lens of provincial health ministries. If we cannot adequately support the mental health issues of refugees this will continue to impact their ability to learn one of Canada's official languages as well as integrate into the labour market;
- Overseas pre arrival-pre departure orientation programs for resettled refugees, specifically for youth and young people needs to be expanded. The unique migration experiences faced by youth and young people are distinct from their parents-guardians. In general, we need to ensure that all resettled refugees are provided with some targeted specialized pre departure orientation prior to coming to Canada;
- Additional targeted settlement funding for multi-year (up to 18-24 months) first language settlement case management support including escort accompaniment provision of special need refugee families;
- Introduction of block funding and/or alternative funding mechanism under Interim Federal Health (IFH) provisions to address the urgent primary health care needs of refugee clients; and,
- Child care provisions within the Resettlement Assistance Program are needed. Current Treasury Board guidelines prevent the provision of child care-child minding supports for government assisted refugee parents during their first six (6) weeks in Canada. This means that women, specifically mothers with young children, cannot actively participate and attend the first language orientation sessions provided during their first few weeks in Canada.

Our members' direct work with immigrants and refugees constitute nation building. Our ability as a country to successfully integrate newcomers both economically and socially is directly related in part to ensuring that newcomers have the programs they need in place to actively participate and contribute to Canadian society.