



# METROPOLIS BRITISH COLUMBIA

Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Diversity

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***The Housing Experiences and Coping  
Strategies of Recent Immigrants in the  
Suburbs of Vancouver  
(Surrey and Richmond)***

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# **Metropolis British Columbia**

## ***Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Diversity***

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### **THE HOUSING EXPERIENCES AND COPING STRATEGIES OF RECENT IMMIGRANTS IN THE SUBURBS OF VANCOUVER (SURREY AND RICHMOND)**

**Carlos Teixeira**

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## ABSTRACT

While immigrants continue to arrive in Canada's traditional metropolitan gateway areas, recent data from the Canadian Census has sparked significant interest in immigrant dispersal to new destinations outside major urban centres, especially the suburbs. Rapid population growth and concentration of immigrants and minorities in the suburbs has led to an increasing demand for affordable rental housing. This study evaluates the housing experiences and coping strategies of recent immigrants in Richmond and Surrey, two fast-growing outer suburbs of Vancouver, where the immigrant population has rapidly increased in the last decades and where there is a short supply of affordable rental housing, including public and social housing. This study uses data from seven focus groups with 88 recent immigrants and 15 interviews with key stakeholders, conducted in Vancouver, Richmond, and Surrey in 2010. The evidence indicates that this new group of immigrants faces numerous difficulties (e.g., high rents, overcrowding, poor-quality housing) in the rental housing market. Most immigrants were spending more than 50% of their monthly household income on housing, putting them at risk of homelessness. The study's findings suggest that the housing crisis affecting Surrey and Richmond – a limited supply of affordable rental housing and high living costs for many new immigrants – make these two cities a unique and challenging region of Vancouver in which to settle. Funding from all levels of government (federal, provincial, and local) to stimulate the creation of both for-profit and non-profit housing is urgently needed. The shortage of appropriate housing services and programs is also a major gap in the settlement services in the region.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the most important characteristics of recent Canadian immigration is the fact that immigrants prefer to settle in major urban areas, with preference given to Toronto, Vancouver, and Montreal (almost 70% of Canada's recent immigrants chose these three cities in the period 2001–2006). As some researchers have noted, "immigration to Canada is a tale of three cities" (Abu-Laban and Garber, 2005, 535). Thus, a different range of forces has gradually but radically transformed the face of our cities and their neighbourhoods.

Canada's largest urban areas and their suburbs are experiencing dramatic demographic, economic, and cultural changes as a consequence of immigration. These changes have profoundly altered not only the social and cultural composition of neighbourhoods, but also their complex housing (sub)markets. We cannot begin to understand housing markets in Canada without addressing the impact of immigration on these markets (Carter and Vitiello, 2012; Hiebert and Mendez, 2008; Li and Teixeira, 2007; Moos and Skaburskis, 2010).

The increasingly heterogeneous nature of immigration to Canada is mirrored in the diverse settlement patterns of immigrants. Some groups form ethnic enclaves—either settling initially in traditional immigrant reception areas downtown and later re-segregating in the suburbs, or immigrating directly to suburbs—while others are scattered across the urban and suburban landscape. These complex settlement patterns have resulted in major challenges for the socioeconomic and cultural inclusion of these immigrants, for policy-makers from all levels of government, and for social service providers and business leaders (Carter and Vitiello 2012; Kilbride and Webber, 2006; Larrivé 2011; Lo et al. 2010; Murdie and Skop 2012).

Case studies indicate that new immigrants and refugees are contributing to the formation and growth of low-income poverty pockets within different cities of Metro Vancouver (Brunner and Friesen 2011). Within this context, service providers often face problems with regard to the delivery of information services to newcomers: “Can they find jobs that satisfy them and meet their needs? ... Can they access the programs and services they need to ensure their overall health and well-being? ... How do newcomers or prospective immigrants find out about these services? And how can they be encouraged to take advantage of these services sooner rather than later?” (Motz 2011, 71). Despite efforts by different levels of government (e.g., Welcome BC) to enhance information service delivery to newcomers, much remains to be done to ensure that the needs of newcomers are met, including access to housing information (Motz 2011).

Recent data from the Canadian Census has sparked significant interest in immigrant dispersal to new destinations outside major urban centres (Abu-Laban and Garber 2005; Broadway 2000; Brunner and Friesen 2011; Preston et al. 2009; Radford 2007; Sherrell 2009). Rapid population growth and the concentration of immigrants and minorities in the suburbs have led to increasing demand for increasingly scarce affordable housing. Many immigrants and refugees are forced to live in crowded conditions with other immigrants of the same ethnic background, or with family and/or ethnic friends—common coping strategies that can represent “hidden homelessness” (Fiedler, Schuurman and Hyndman 2006; Hiebert et al. 2006; Teixeira and Halliday 2010). This dispersal away from the largest receiving areas is also contributing to changes in the geography of immigrant settlement (Murdie and Skop, 2012; Murdie and Teixeira, 2003; Qadeer, Agrawal and Lowell, 2010). Clearly, it is imperative for scholars to address the new realities of immigration outside the major urban

areas, which include issues such as immigrant access to housing in the outer suburbs.

Research into the constraints and outcomes of the housing experiences of immigrants and minorities has policy implications for all levels of government. How can Canada accommodate newcomers in appropriate, secure, and permanent housing given that “good housing facilitates successful resettlement and accelerates the integration process” (Murdie 2008b, 82)? This research evaluates the housing experiences and coping strategies of recent immigrants in Richmond and Surrey, two fast-growing outer suburbs of Vancouver where the immigrant population has rapidly increased in the last decades and where there is a shortage of affordable rental housing.

#### HOUSING NEW IMMIGRANTS: EVIDENCE FROM THE CANADIAN LITERATURE

In recent years, Canadian scholars have paid increased attention to the relationship between access to affordable housing and the residential concentrations of immigrants and minorities on the one hand, and successful integration and inclusion on the other. For immigrants, it is not only the type of housing, but also the neighbourhood in which that housing is found that affects successful integration in a new society (Darden and Fong 2012; Murdie and Ghosh, 2010; Teixeira and Li, 2009). The following major research themes have been investigated: (a) immigrants’ housing careers and barriers to housing; (b) access to homeownership; (c) homelessness and hidden homelessness; (d) discrimination by urban gatekeepers in the housing market; (e) settlement patterns, ethnic neighbourhoods, and the social geography of immigrants; (f) neighbourhood institutions and settlement services; (g) ethnic concentration and residential geography; and (h) changing residential neighbourhoods (for reviews of the literature, see Murdie and Logan 2011; Teixeira, 2011).

While the housing literature in Canada has examined the barriers and challenges that immigrants face in the rental housing market, or the different factors that help or hinder various immigrant groups in achieving homeownership, these studies have either been national in scope or have focused mainly on the major metropolitan areas, or “ports of entry,” where most immigrants live (Bunting, Walks and Filion, 2004; Carter 2005; Murdie, Preston, Chevalier and Ghosh, 2006; Moore and Skaburskis, 2004; Painter and Yu 2010, 443). The outer suburbs of these major metropolitan areas, however, have largely been ignored.

It has been established that recent immigrants are more likely than Canadian-born residents to spend large amounts of their total household income on housing costs (Preston et al. 2009). However, more research is needed on vulnerable households in the outer suburbs (those spending at least 30 percent of their entire income on housing), and households at high risk (those spending at least 50 percent of their income on housing).

For new immigrants and refugees, access to adequate and affordable housing is essential for their successful integration into Canadian society (Carter, Polevychok, Friesen and Osborne 2008; Ghosh 2007; Murdie 2008b; Murdie and Teixeira 2003; Preston, Murdie and Murnaghan, 2007; Rose and Ray 2001). However, homelessness is a risk for growing numbers of new immigrants and particularly for visible minority groups and refugees, who are more likely to face significant housing affordability problems, including forms of “hidden homelessness” (D’Addario, Hiebert and Sherrell, 2007; Fiedler, Schuurman and Hyndman 2006; Kilbride and Webber 2006). There is also a growing awareness among scholars as to the cultural importance some immigrant groups attach to homeownership and the impact of these groups upon urban and suburban housing prices, as well as their settlement prefer-

ences with regard to where to live and work in Canada's urban and suburban areas (Hiebert 2005; Hiebert and Mendez 2008; Teixeira 2005). While some affluent newcomers (e.g., business class immigrants with sufficient assets to purchase housing upon arrival) have been settling in the major gateway cities of Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver and their suburbs in relatively high-priced housing, others—including new immigrants, refugees, and visible minorities—are settling in lower-quality housing in neighbourhoods characterized by high rates of poverty (Brunner and Friesen 2011; Murdie and Skop 2011). This latter group of newcomers faces ever-increasing barriers to homeownership; as recent studies show that homeownership rates are declining with successive cohorts of immigrants, due in part to waning income prospects. The intersections between immigration, housing, and homelessness are numerous and often complex. As Bunting, Walks, and Filion (2004, 361) note, "From both a policy and theoretical perspective ... greater attention needs to be paid to the spatial aspects of housing affordability and to the related, economically-induced risk of homelessness in Canadian metropolitan areas."

Access to affordable housing, the residential concentration of immigrants and visible minorities, and their relationship to community building, have become a focus in larger Canadian metropolitan areas (Carter and Vitiello 2012; Hiebert et al. 2006; Murdie and Skop 2012). This interest is not only a consequence of the high level of immigration to Canada in recent decades, but also a reflection of concern for the broader social structure in which members of society are sorted into a stratified landscape. Immigrant residential clustering can also be viewed as a crucial aspect of the immigrant integration trajectory (Darden and Fong 2012; Murdie and Ghosh 2010). From this perspective, ethnic communities may be seen as complex sociopolitical, geographical, and cultural structures that take shape over time through the migration process.

Recent studies point out that the factors contributing to residential integration are more complicated in a multi-ethnic context. Moreover, scholars recognize that race and ethnicity remain barriers to the equal treatment of immigrants and minorities in Canada's housing market (Danso and Grant, 2000; Darden 2004; Hulchanski and Shapcott 2004; Lai and Huffey 2009; Mensah 2005; Murdie 1994, 2002; Teixeira 2008).

Research in Canada's largest gateway cities suggests that visible minority groups, including new immigrants and refugees, may be at a disadvantage in both the rental and homeownership markets. For these groups, the housing search process—gathering and using information about the availability of housing vacancies, particularly in expensive housing markets with low vacancy rates—can be a stressful experience. Recent immigrants may also face language barriers and other forms of discrimination (despite human rights and multicultural policies) in tight, expensive housing markets (Drolet, Robertson, Multani, Robinson and Wroz, 2008; Fiedler, Schuurman and Hyndman 2006; Fong and Chan 2010; Miraftab 2000; Ray and Preston 2009; Rose 2001; Rose and Ray, 2001; Teixeira 1995, 2008). These constraints can contribute to the creation and perpetuation of high levels of involuntary residential concentrations of immigrants, including racial and ethnic segregation in housing markets (Darden and Fong 2012; Ray and Preston 2009; Darden 2004; Novac, Darden, Hulchanski and Seguin 2004; Dion 2001; Teixeira and Murdie 1997).

In addition to a lack of information about the functioning of the housing market, immigrants' access to adequate, suitable, and affordable housing is also subject to spatial biases and constraints through discriminatory practices by real estate agents, landlords, mortgage lenders, and other private and non-private agencies that affect new immigrants' housing options. The literature suggests that these difficulties have become more acute in Canada since

the mid-1990s, given low levels of new social housing construction, relatively high rents in the private housing market, low vacancy rates, and funding cuts to social assistance and support for the non-governmental organizations that normally assist new immigrants and refugees (Murdie 2008a).

While these issues have long been concerns in major Canadian gateway cities such as Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, they are also increasingly important in the growing outer suburbs of these and other major cities. The housing markets in the outer suburbs of Vancouver (e.g., Richmond and Surrey) and in Toronto (e.g., York and Peel Regions) are typical of Canada's outer suburbs generally, being predominantly composed of expensive, single, detached, owner-occupied dwellings. The supply of social housing and the provision of settlement services for new immigrants and refugees are also limited (Preston et al. 2009; Sherrell, 2009). Housing costs in the rental and homeownership markets determine who can afford to move to the outer suburbs of metropolitan areas. Since immigration has been identified as an engine of economic growth, the fact that newcomers face barriers in securing affordable housing in the outer suburbs has policy implications of interest to policy-makers, politicians, and social service providers.

The scarcity of research on the housing experiences of immigrants and minorities in the outer suburbs prevents a full understanding of (a) why certain immigrant groups are more successful than others in locating appropriate housing in a suitable or comfortable neighbourhood, and (b) the factors that facilitate or prevent this phenomenon in the outer suburbs of our metropolitan areas. This paper will address this gap by evaluating the housing experiences and coping strategies of new immigrants in the outer suburbs of Vancouver (Richmond and Surrey). It concludes with recommendations for improving housing for new immigrants in the outer suburbs.

## METHOD

Data for this pilot study was collected in summer 2010 (July to September) and includes two major research methods: semi-structured interviews with key informants and focus groups with recent immigrants.

Semi-structured interviews with 15 key stakeholders, including service providers in Vancouver (4), Richmond (5), and Surrey (6), took place in August. Key informants interviewed by the author included individuals involved in immigrant settlement and housing services, social workers, B.C. Housing, CMHC officials, and social planners and city officials from the cities of Richmond and Surrey. With the exception of two interviews conducted by telephone, all other interviews were undertaken at the key informants' place of work.

In light of the limited amount of information about the housing experiences of immigrants in the outer suburbs, the key informant interviews were designed to obtain information on (a) the major challenges new immigrants face in accessing affordable rental housing; (b) the quality of information available on settlement programs and housing services to immigrants, and (c) advice on improving the supply of affordable housing and of specialized (ethno-specific) housing services to new immigrants.

Seven focus groups (four in Surrey and three in Richmond) were held with recent immigrants. To be eligible to participate in the focus groups, recent immigrants had to have been born outside Canada; have arrived between 2000 and 2009; and be living in rental housing in Richmond or Surrey. Each participant received \$30 for participating in the focus group.

In total, 88 recent immigrant renters (56 from Surrey and 32 from Richmond) participated in Surrey, at SUCCESS Settlement Services and the Progressive Intercultural Community Services Society (PICS), and in Richmond, at the

Richmond Multicultural Community Services (RMCS). In both cities the focus group participants were recruited through SUCCESS, PICS, and RMCS. The focus group participants reflect, to a certain degree, some of the largest immigrants groups living in the two cities (see Table 1). Although focus group participants are not a representative sample of the immigrants living in Richmond and Surrey, they do illustrate the ethnic and racial diversity of the population of these cities.

Because recent immigrants were identified with the assistance of SUCCESS, PICS, and RMCS, a bias may have been introduced in that the sample may over-represent immigrants who make greater use of settlement service agencies and required greater assistance in the search for housing. Given the small sample and sampling strategies used, together with the exploratory nature of this pilot study, the results must be interpreted with some caution.

The seven focus groups took place between July and September 2010. In the focus groups, immigrants were asked a series of open-ended questions about (a) settlement experiences and housing history since their arrival in Canada, (b) the housing barriers they faced in securing affordable rental housing, (c) the housing search process and access to housing information, (d) the coping strategies they used when confronted with housing barriers, (e) advice on improving the supply of affordable rental housing, as well as housing services and programs to new immigrants in search of affordable housing, and (f) housing outcomes and residential satisfaction. In addition to participating in a discussion about their housing experiences and challenges in Richmond or Surrey, each participant completed a 5-page questionnaire with 29 questions that asked them to provide basic sociodemographic information about themselves, including their housing situation and information about their migration. The questionnaire used in this study is a slightly revised ver-

sion of a questionnaire previously used in a 2009 study conducted by the York University team led by Valerie Preston and Robert A. Murdie in York Region, Ontario (see Preston et al. 2009). The questionnaire results were entered into a database to provide descriptive statistics about the focus group participants, as well as aspects related to their housing situation.

The interviews with key informants and the focus groups were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by theme.

## IMMIGRANTS' SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES IN RICHMOND AND SURREY

### *Housing Markets and the Suburbanization of Immigrants*

In recent years both Richmond and Surrey have become popular destinations for new immigrants arriving in Canada. Between 1986 and 2006, Surrey's immigrant population grew from 39,315 to 150,230, while Richmond's grew from 34,005 to 99,660 (BC Statistics 2006a, 2006b). Immigrants came mainly from Asia and the Middle East (67% of Surrey's total immigrant population compared to 81.6% in Richmond), but immigrants from all over the world have fuelled growth in Surrey and Richmond. In a relatively short period, these two outer suburbs of Vancouver have become important "ports of entry" for new immigrants and refugees, including members of visible minorities (46% of Surrey's population are members of visible minorities compared to a much higher percentage of 65% in Richmond). The two most important visible minority groups in both cities are South Asians (27%), in Surrey, and Chinese (44%), in Richmond (BC Statistics, 2006c, 2006d). These new immigrant groups are, in turn, shaping the social geography, as well as the complex local housing markets of these cities.

As indicated by previous studies, immigrants and refugees tend to settle and concentrate in specific areas in Richmond (e.g., Richmond Centre) or in Surrey (e.g., City Centre, Whalley, parts of Guildford, and central Newton) (see Brunner and Friesen 2011; Fiedler, Schuurman and Hyndman 2006). The literature also shows that distinct pockets of housing affordability stress and poverty exist in these areas/neighbourhoods of the outer suburbs. These areas are often associated with recent immigrants and refugee renters in core housing need; that is, areas where “hidden” homelessness may be present (see Bunting, Walks and Filion 2004). These concentrations are associated with areas with many low-income households, where low-cost market rental housing is clustered, and which are well served by public transportation routes (see Fiedler, Schuurman and Hyndman 2006). According to Fiedler, Schuurman, and Hyndman (2006, 213) the patterns in the Greater Vancouver area are “consistent with other Canadian studies [such as those in Toronto] that have noted the suburbanization of poverty and immigrants.” The authors add: “[T]he presence of areas where recent immigrants in housing need are concentrated in conjunction with high levels of poverty raises the possibility of social dislocation and exclusion” (Fiedler, Schuurman and Hyndman, 2006, 214).

In Vancouver, “housing in-affordability stress in the outer suburbs has been produced by hugely inflated housing markets that occurred in the 1980s when demand for housing far exceeded the supply that could be built on the ground” (Bunting, Walks and Filion 2004, 386). Furthermore, “in most places residential real estate in the newer suburbs is expensive, relative to older units... as well, the outer suburbs contain a relatively small proportion of rental housing because production of rental housing dropped precipitously after the mid-1970s. Outer suburban municipalities ... have also been characterized as eager to ‘zone’ out rental apartments in strategic attempts to uphold the

values of single-family housing... [also]... the majority of services targeting the housing-stressed tend, on the other hand, to be 'consumed' in the inner city" (Bunting, Walks and Filion, 2004, 386, 387). A specific focus on recent immigrants' housing experiences is thus both necessary and appropriate.

Urbanization is affecting Surrey and Richmond's real estate and housing markets. Among the most important consequences is the increasing demand for affordable housing both for sale and rent. Moving to the suburbs to achieve ownership of a single detached home, located in a good neighbourhood, has long been part of the "Canadian dream" for those born both inside and outside the country. More than two-thirds of the residents in Surrey and Richmond (75.2% in Surrey and 76.3% in Richmond) are homeowners. One of the main characteristics of the housing stock in these two outer suburbs is the predominance of single, detached houses. The census data in 2006 shows that 43.8% of the housing in Surrey consisted of single, detached houses; the proportion was 41.3% in Richmond. The figures for the Province of British Columbia were higher at 49.2% (CMHC 2010). The average value of owned dwellings is higher in Richmond than in Surrey (\$457,419 in Richmond and \$446,307 in Surrey), figures much higher than that for the province as a whole, which is \$418,703 (CMHC, 2010).

In 2006, average monthly rents in Richmond varied from \$902 (for a one-bedroom unit) to \$1,096 (two bedrooms), compared with the provincial average of \$871 for a one-bedroom unit and \$1,019 for two bedrooms (CMHC 2010). The figures for Surrey are lower, at \$725 and \$880 respectively. Moreover, the vacancy rates in Surrey were much higher than in Richmond (4.2% in Surrey and 1.5% in Richmond), compared with the provincial vacancy rate of 2.7% (CMHC 2010).

The 2006 Census data also shows that in Surrey, 9.3% of owner-occupied households spent 30% or more of their income on shelter; the figure

was 14.2% in Richmond. The percentage of tenant households that spent 30% or more on shelter was about one-third in both cities (34.6% in Surrey and 31.6% in Richmond). In comparison, 29.9% of all British Columbia renters spent more than 30% or more of their income on shelter, while only 8.2% of all homeowners found themselves in the same situation (CMHC, 2010).

### *The Social Characteristics of Focus Group Participants*

Most of the participants in our focus groups were born in Asia (China, Philippines, or India): 48% in Surrey and 76% in Richmond (Table 1). However, 43% of the participants in Surrey came from Iraq, now an important source of new immigrants and refugees to the city. Most participants were female (71% in Surrey; 53% in Richmond) and half of the adult participants in the focus groups were married (57% in Surrey; 56% in Richmond). The average participant in Surrey was 46 years old and in Richmond 43.8 years old. At the time of the focus groups, the majority of participants (79% in Surrey; 81% in Richmond) were landed immigrants (Table 1). However, some participants (e.g., Iraqis) had first arrived in Canada as refugees or via another country before entering in Canada.

About half of the participants in both cities had some postsecondary education (e.g., bachelor's or master's degree). However, these high levels of education were not commensurate with each participant's paid work in the past 12 months. Close to half of the participants (49% in Surrey; 44% in Richmond) were looking for paid work, or were going to school to improve their language or job skills. Of those who had a job, close to one-third (in both cities) were working full-time, but most were still in low-paying blue-collar positions. The high degree of frustration and dissatisfaction the majority of the participants experienced with regard to the type of job they do in Canada, as well as well

**TABLE 1: RENTERS' SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE**

	SURREY (N=56)	RICHMOND (N=32)
<b>COUNTRY BORN</b>		
Iraq	43%	6%
India	21%	16%
Philippines	27%	22%
China	---	38%
Other	9%	19%
<b>SEX</b>		
Female	71%	53%
Male	29%	47%
<b>MARITAL STATUS</b>		
Married	57%	56%
Single	25%	28%
Divorced	7%	9%
Common- Law	---	9%
Other	14%	---
<b>AVERAGE AGE</b>		
	46.1	43.8
<b>ABILITY TO SPEAK ENGLISH</b>		
Fluent/Very good	36%	59%
Moderate/Poor	64%	41%
<b>HIGHEST EDUCATION</b>		
Bachelor's or Undergraduate university degree	46%	31%
Master's degree	11%	19%
Diploma or certificate from trade, technical or vocational school	14%	13%
Diploma from college, CEGEP or nursing school	14%	13%
Some university	4%	16%
High school diploma	7%	9%
Other	4%	---
<b>PAST 12 MONTHS MAIN ACTIVITY</b>		
Working at a job or self-employed	32%	38%
Looking for paid work	35%	28%
Going to school	14%	16%
Unpaid: caring for own children/caring for other family members/household work	7%	9%
Other	5%	--
<b>CURRENT IMMIGRATION STATUS</b>		
Landed immigrant	79%	81%
Citizen	5%	13%
Refugee claimant	5%	6%
Temporary visa holder	4%	--
Other/D.K.	7%	--

Source: Questionnaire Survey, Focus groups, 2010

as the low pay they get in return for their work, was a common refrain during the focus groups. Given the recession in 2010, many participants were in a state of emotional and/or financial stress due to a lack of stable work, poorly paid work, or fear of losing their present job. Not surprisingly, most showed a preoccupation with their job prospects in the near future. Some participants shared their thoughts on this important issue:

It is not so much about housing. If you have money you can afford it, correct? What we need are people to recognize our qualifications ... to create opportunities for jobs. Dishwashing pays 7/7 hour... You go to the grocery store, who is washing the groceries? Immigrants. You go to McDonalds, who is in the kitchen? Immigrants ... some highly qualified people. It is not about housing ... Housing is just the tip of the iceberg ... it's something that leads to housing that is the problem. It's financial.

They [the Canadian Government] allowed us to come here, we thank them for that. OK ... that does not deny the fact that when we come here we face a lot of issues in discrimination in looking for a job. If your certificate is from India, good luck! McDonalds is a very high paying job for you. If you are lucky, you end up working at the sky train station cleaning up people's dust... We feel we are like in a "free prison." So you are free but you are in jail, somehow, because you are psychologically in jail, you can't really handle it. It takes a whole lot of change. So you have to do what you have to do to succeed in Canada, and probably collect your shame in order to go home and be welcomed by your people, you know. That is true; it's not a laughing matter.

With regard to their ability to speak one of Canada's official languages, participants in Richmond showed a better knowledge of the English language, with close to two-thirds considering themselves "fluent" or "very good" in terms of their ability to speak the language. In contrast, only one-third (36%) of the participants in Surrey demonstrated similar skills/knowledge of the English language.

Preston et al. (2009) found that immigrants in the outer suburbs of Toronto (York Region) faced similar disadvantages, which affected their integration and housing experiences.

### *Settling in Surrey and Richmond*

Most of the focus group participants were new to the country as well as to the cities of Surrey and Richmond. The majority were fairly new to the region, having lived in Richmond and Surrey for less than three years (75% in Surrey; 63% in Richmond). Most came directly to Surrey and Richmond upon their arrival in the country (68% in Surrey; 50% in Richmond). However, 21% of participants in Surrey and 31% in Richmond had first lived in a different city in the Greater Vancouver area—either temporarily (most with relatives and/or friends) or in permanent housing—before they chose to come to Surrey or Richmond (Table 2). Many participants shared accommodation with relatives and/or friends from the same ethnic background upon arrival in Canada (36% in Surrey; 75% in Richmond). In general, the length of time spent living in shared accommodation varied from a few days or weeks to a few months. For many participants, this housing experience was a short-term solution prior to finding permanent housing.

In most cases, participants viewed living with relatives or friends upon their arrival as a short-term housing solution—a strategy for coping with their lack of familiarity with the city, its people, and culture as well as its complex housing markets. For many, it was a way to save some money before renting their own place. Sharing accommodation was especially important for the Chinese group in Richmond and the East Indian group in Surrey—two well-established communities in the region. These two immigrant groups are also well known for their strong social networks and community structure/ser-

VICES as well as for high levels of homeownership—both factors creating the opportunity for homeowners in these groups to rent to people from their own ethnic background. An important supply of rental housing in the region thus comes from inside the Chinese and East Indian communities, which helps homeowners in these groups save money to help pay their mortgages and helps renters in search of affordable housing.

**TABLE 2: SETTLEMENT EXPERIENCES IN THE NEW COUNTRY - CANADA**

	SURREY (N=56)	RICHMOND (N=32)
<b>LENGTH OF RESIDENCE IN CANADA</b>		
Less than 1 year	30%	13%
1-3 years	45%	50%
4-6 years	11%	19%
More than 6 years	14%	19%
<b>HOUSING EXPERIENCES IN CANADA</b>		
Lived independently/Renter	73%	84%
Lived in a shared accommodation	36%	75%
Lived in an emergency shelter	13%	19%
Not usual residence	11%	28%
Other	5%	9%
<b>LAST PLACE OF RESIDENCE BEFORE MOVING TO SURREY/RICHMOND</b>		
Home country	68%	50%
Vancouver (GVA)	21%	31%
Via other country	11%	19%
<b>LENGTH OF RESIDENCE IN SURREY/RICHMOND</b>		
Less than 1 year	30%	13%
1-3 years	52%	59%
4-6 years	13%	16%
More than 6 years	5%	13%
<b>REASONS FOR CHOOSING SURREY/RICHMOND</b>		
Less expensive housing	45%	28%
To live near people of the same ethnic background	30%	41%
Ties to relatives/friends	34%	31%
Social or other services	23%	16%
Job opportunities	16%	25%
Other	3%	9%

Source: Questionnaire Survey, Focus groups, 2010

The same cannot be said of the other participants in the focus groups, particularly those coming from Iraq and the Philippines, members of less well-established communities in Surrey and Richmond. These newer arrivals lack a community infrastructure to support members in terms of housing information and supply. We could conclude from the focus groups that if sharing accommodation initially with relatives or friends had disadvantages (e.g., overcrowding, lack of privacy, family tensions due to living under the same roof), it also had the advantage of providing the participants with some sort of “comfort zone” in which they could count on support, which made them feel more “at home” in the region.

Focus group participants decided to settle in Surrey and Richmond for three main reasons: (a) to live near people of the same ethnic/cultural background; (b) because “ties to relatives and friends” were already established in the region, and/or (c) housing costs/rents were less expensive (Table 2). The desire to live close to people of the same ethnic/racial and cultural background and to ethnic networks (family members and friends) thus played a key role for the majority of our participants in their search for housing and jobs upon their arrival in the region. Participants described the importance of contact with their ethnic networks in the integration process in the following ways:

When we arrived one of my wife’s relatives told us that we could only afford to rent a basement suite. My wife started crying... back home [in India] we had a bungalow. How can we live here [Surrey] underground?... We lived with my wife’s relatives and we shared the rent for a few months, then we decided to move to our own apartment.

We did have some relatives here who helped us a lot [finding permanent housing and a part-time job].... So they helped us for a few weeks. And then after that, we were on our own. Initially everyone has to go through that

phase until you get settled. You have to think positively. There is no point in being negative... make your circle of friends and move on.

Other immigrants, particularly those who were sponsored as refugees by their churches or mosques, emphasized the important role these religious organizations played in their lives:

We have here [in Surrey] a lot of people from the Middle East, so you try to find friends. Iraqis... we have a big community here and because of that we have a lot of friends.... I have around 30 here [participant lives close to the mosque]... At the mosque we have a lot of activities [and services] for our community and we help each other. Some don't have cars so we live close to the mosque which helps us a lot.

I choose Surrey... and my first residence was close to the mosque.... [It's a] big community [Pakistani], which is a good plus point.

These findings echo earlier research conducted in the outer suburbs of Vancouver (Sherrell 2009) and Toronto (Lo et al. 2010; Preston et al. 2009), showing that new immigrants and refugees feel more comfortable relying on their own (informal) social networks than on formal Canadian sources (e.g., government organizations, NGOs, or professional housing service agencies). Yet despite the advantages these ethno-specific social networks offer new immigrants in the first year of settlement, particularly in their housing searches, much less is known about their limitations. Personal contacts, for example, including local ethnic social, cultural, and religious organizations, may be limited in terms of the quantity and quality of housing information they can provide. More research is needed on the efficiency and reliability of these "social networks/contacts" in the outer suburbs— their role and impact on the suburbanization of immigration, on immigrants' housing trajectories, as well as on their integration into the larger society. More research is also needed on the possible reasons—the cultural and structural "forces"—for why many new

immigrants do not rely extensively on formal channels of information (e.g., NGOs, government organizations) when looking for housing, particularly in their first year of settlement.

At this stage, numerous questions remain unanswered in the Canadian housing literature. Are immigrants aware of these formal sources of information where they live? What do they know about their programs and services? Do they receive enough information from the local community, including the various levels of government, about these services and programs before and after arrival in Canada? Can language barriers or an immigrant's lack of trust in Canadian sources be a barrier to immigrants' making use of these information channels, or do these Canadian sources not provide an adequate quantity and quality (preferably ethno-specific) of housing assistance to satisfy immigrants' housing needs and preferences?

The few studies available in the Canadian housing literature show that in Richmond and Surrey there is an urgent need for more organizations to become involved in the provision of specialized housing services to newcomers. Specifically, there is also need for city-based housing search specialists who are familiar with the local housing (sub)markets and the social geography of the city who can provide area-specific housing information as well as ongoing assistance and support to newcomers arriving in the outer suburbs (see Sherrell 2009, 6). Lo and her team (2010, i-ii) note that, in the face of a rapidly growing and increasingly diverse population in the suburban areas of large Canadian metropolises, "it is crucial to explore the conditions of services to vulnerable groups." The challenge for policy-makers and service providers is to "raise awareness and improve services delivery in low-density suburbs."

## CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION

### *Renters in the Private Rental Sector*

Once they are in Canada, most immigrant families work to improve their housing conditions, usually by moving from temporary housing to a permanent residence in the private rental sector, before ultimately attaining the “Canadian dream” of owning their own dwelling, preferably in the suburbs (Murdie and Skop 2012; Teixeira 2007).

At the time of the focus groups, all of our participants were renting their dwelling. Most (51% in Surrey; 39% in Richmond) were renting the entire building (Table 3). It was difficult to solicit information regarding whether participants were subletting part of their dwelling (e.g., rooms, basement, lower floors) to help pay the rent, since many of these arrangements are informal. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that many immigrants in both cities (more by necessity than by choice) tend to sublet parts of their dwelling, usually to members of their own ethnic group. Not surprisingly, this practice leads to high concentrations of immigrants in rental buildings in Surrey and Richmond, often in areas close to religious institutions and major public transportation routes.

Another group of participants (28% in Surrey; 22% in Richmond) could not rent an entire dwelling, but instead were forced—mainly for financial reasons—to rent a single room only (Table 3). Most of these participants arrived in Surrey or Richmond in the last two years and, due to the short length of their stay in the region, have faced the most challenges in the local rental housing markets. Affordability is a major issue for this group of participants and most will not be able to move out of their place (or room) in the near fu-

TABLE 3: CURRENT HOUSING SITUATION

	SURREY (N=56)	RICHMOND (N=32)
<b>TENURE TYPE</b>		
Rent entire dwelling	51%	39%
Rent room only	28%	22%
Other	9%	9%
<b>SUBSIDIZED HOUSING</b>		
Subsidized	9%	7%
Non-subsidized	71%	50%
Don't Know	20%	13%
<b>CURRENT TYPE OF HOUSING</b>		
Apartment w/less than 4 storeys	34%	32%
Basement apartment	31%	19%
Apartment w/more than 4 storeys	20%	13%
Townhouse	7%	19%
Other	9%	19%
<b>LENGTH OF OCCUPANCY</b>		
Less than 1 year	45%	41%
1-2 years	32%	31%
2-3 years	7%	25%
More than 3 years	16%	3%
<b>CURRENT MONTHLY RENT</b>		
Less than \$500	5%	19%
\$500 - \$1,000	66%	34%
\$1,500-\$1,500	14%	38%
More than \$1,500	5%	9%
Don't Know	9%	--
<b>PERCENT OF MONTHLY INCOME SPENT ON HOUSING</b>		
Less than 30%	13%	6%
Between 30% and 50%	34%	28%
More than 50%	54%	69%
<b>ON SOCIAL HOUSING WAIT LIST</b>	<b>N=14 (25%)</b>	<b>N=13 (41%)</b>
<b>ON WAIT LIST FOR</b>		
Less than 1 year	29%	31%
1 year to 3 years	50%	39%
More than 3 years	21%	31%

Source: Questionnaire Survey, Focus groups, 2010

ture. During the focus groups, most of these participants acknowledged that living in a single room, or sharing accommodation with other people was the only route they had to enter the rental housing market and eventually get a

place of their own. For most members of this group of participants, the issue of owning a house seemed like a distant dream. As one participant noted:

Owning a house is the main goal of all immigrants... [but] I am worried about our jobs... finding a stable job where you won't get laid off is not easy... it is scary when I think about buying a house one day.

### *The "Canadian Dream" of Homeownership*

Despite numerous difficulties (e.g., high rents, overcrowding, poor-quality housing), almost all participants (80 out of 88) in the focus groups aspired to become homeowners in the region eventually. At this stage, more research is needed on the levels of immigrant homeownership in the outer suburbs and, in particular, how immigrant families achieved their goal. It is important to identify the different coping strategies (e.g., from sharing accommodation to subletting part of their dwellings) that immigrants use to save enough money to achieve homeownership in the outer suburbs as well as the numerous challenges they face trying to attain this objective. Such information will help service providers, social planners, and policy-makers better understand immigrants' settlement challenges, housing choices and preferences, and their aspirations, as well as their adaptation to life in the suburbs.

Some participants in the focus groups shared their experiences and thoughts on the pressure to become a homeowner:

Back home [in the Philippines] we had a house with a backyard and a lot of land... I cannot stand the idea of living my life here in a cage [basement]... I want my own home with a backyard... it will be good for our children in the future if we move.

We lived in an ancestral home [in India]. We owned it and we were comfortable there. Here [in Richmond], it is important for us to keep the tradition

of owning [land]... It doesn't matter the price we have to pay... we are a strong family.

I still work in two jobs... you have to work hard if you want to achieve [homeownership]. But I also think [that] if you own a house and you have children, it's something no one can take away from you... [landlords] cannot kick me out with one month's notice.

I have four children... so we are a fighting family... we are renting a basement—actually, it is a two-bedroom, but the other bedroom is rented to a couple without children from our country [the Philippines]... We are renting it for \$400, excluding utilities... If we want buy one day, we have to make sacrifices... we have a common kitchen and bathroom [shared by the two families].

### *Living in Apartment Buildings and Basement Units*

None of the participants surveyed were renting a single-detached or semi-detached house and very few (7% in Surrey; 19% in Richmond) were renting townhouses. In contrast, the majority of participants (around 50% in both cities) lived in apartment buildings, while the remaining participants (31% in Surrey; 19% in Richmond) were living in basement apartments (Surrey) and/or on ground floors (Richmond).

Many immigrants' first experiences with Canada's rental housing market were not what they expected when they left their country of origin. Living in a basement apartment is a coping strategy used by many participants, but at what price? One participant noted:

I never got used to it... [the] lack of sunlight in the basement made me sick. My wife was depressed... the landlord was always reminding us of the noise that our kids were making... they are kids, you know, and I cannot control them 24 hours a day... [It was] depressing for us. But what can I do? Canadians will say you came on your own to this country.

Moving to a basement is not an easy task until unless you find the right type of landlords; otherwise they try to be very stingy and not cooperative.

### *High Housing Costs: At Risk of Homelessness?*

Two-thirds of the participants in Surrey were paying between \$500 and \$1,000 a month in rent, while in Richmond only 34% of the participants were paying similar amounts (Table 3). Almost half (47%) of those in Richmond were paying more than \$1,000 a month in rent compared to only 19% in Surrey, indicating that Richmond's rental housing market is more expensive than Surrey's.

In general, our participants found renting in both cities very expensive. Most of the participants in Surrey (54%) and Richmond (69%) were spending more than 50% of their monthly household income on housing, putting them at risk of homelessness. In sum, this group of recent immigrants is under enormous financial pressure to pay high shelter costs. Not surprisingly, many of these participants want access to subsidized housing. In fact, 25% of the respondents in Surrey and 41% in Richmond were already on a social housing wait list (Table 3). However, limited supplies of social housing in both Surrey and Richmond in addition to long waiting lists made many participants in the focus groups pessimistic about their ability to obtain this type of accommodation.

### *Housing Solutions: The Need for More Subsidized Housing*

Respondents in the focus groups were unanimous in citing an urgent need for more subsidized housing in Richmond and Surrey. They believe all levels of government should do more to ease their settlement and integration in the region. Access to affordable housing is crucial for these immigrants at this stage

of their settlement and integration in Surrey and Richmond. Some participants made suggestions:

There is some miscommunication which they [the government] should rectify before you step in Canada... they should let you know or inform correctly about what you will or will not find in terms of housing, jobs, qualifications... how it works here.... How can I get help from the government? Where to find the type of house I need? Where can I find this information?... Instead they just paint a rosy picture... If I knew all this, I would still give a second thought and say, You know what?... I still have to struggle here for five years. Am I ready for this?

It would be nice to have a housing program just for new immigrants... anybody with housing problems... whether they are here for one, two, or five years it doesn't matter... if they need housing they need housing. Period.... if they need help, they should get it. It's not only in the first year that we struggle... now with the recession it can take years before we can settle down... so we need help now... we need more transition-type of housing, more subsidized housing... and the waiting lists for social housing never end.

We need more services to help us find housing that we can afford.... Surrey is huge... where to find affordable housing when people don't know you and you don't know them. This is a different world... and if you don't own a car it's a nightmare.

Another participant had a different view of this issue and underlined the importance of close-knit ethnic communities to help new immigrants on their arrival in the outer suburbs:

The government cannot do everything for you... it will take more taxes from you, even if the programs are for us. I think there is need [for] more people from our community to help us. Your family, your church... they helped me a lot. Because I think we always look at the government to do things and then the government does it for a little while and then that's where the discrimination comes from, because Canadians who have lived here for a long time get upset, because they think "How are these new immigrants getting all these services?"... [it] should be a collective [community] responsibility.

## MOBILITY, CURRENT HOUSING CONDITIONS AND RESIDENTIAL SATISFACTION

### *Moving in Search of Affordable Housing*

The Canadian housing literature shows that high levels of residential mobility characterize the settlement patterns of recent immigrants in Canada's major cities. But relatively little is known about the residential mobility of recent immigrants in the outer suburbs of major metropolitan areas. What are the main "push-pull" forces behind their decisions to move? The limited literature available shows that a combination of low vacancy rates, expensive rental markets, and a shortage of non-profit and public or social housing in the outer suburbs may complicate immigrants' choices in terms of where to look for affordable housing. Ultimately, their residential mobility may be constrained by the lack of affordable housing and/or housing information (Preston et al. 2009; Teixeira 2007).

We asked participants for the main reasons (push-pull forces) behind their decision to move to their current residence in Surrey or Richmond. Close to two-thirds of the participants in both cities cited "rents too expensive" or "unaffordable housing" as the most important triggers (stress) leading them to move to their present residence. A less significant group of participants (around one-third in Surrey versus one-quarter in Richmond) indicated that the "quality" or "housing conditions" of their previous residence was an important reason—a "push" force—for moving. Other reasons cited for moving included "number of children" and "accessibility." More participants from Surrey (20%) cited "large families," being "close to public transportation," or being "close to schools," as important factors contributing to the move to their present residence, compared with participants from Richmond (10%).

Participants' reasons for moving reflect the reality of Surrey and Richmond's rental housing markets as well as problems with the local municipal infrastructure: high rents, poor-quality housing in certain neighbourhoods, and an inadequate public transportation system (particularly in Surrey, one of the largest municipalities in Canada, especially with regard to bus routes in areas with high concentrations of immigrants or low-income residents).

These findings echo earlier research in large Canadian metropolitan areas showing that new immigrants often move in search of better, more affordable housing conditions in better neighbourhoods (see Murdie and Teixeira 2003). These moves are often very stressful and time-consuming experiences for recent immigrants due, in part, to the limited supply of affordable housing. Another source of stress is limited access to public transportation (particularly for those who do not own a car) which can affect immigrants' ability to integrate into the social, cultural, and economic life of the outer suburbs (see Lo et al. 2010; Preston et al. 2009).

### *Barriers Encountered in the Housing Search*

Many participants in the focus groups indicated that the search for affordable rental housing in Surrey or Richmond was, in general, a stressful experience for them and their families. About 72% (40 out of 56) of the participants in Surrey and 50% (16 out of 32) in Richmond described their housing search as "difficult." The most frequently cited difficulties in their housing search were, in order of importance: (a) income level versus housing costs (rents); (b) a lack of in-depth and reliable housing information about the local rental housing markets; and (c) discrimination or prejudice by the landlords they contacted.

These barriers seem to have limited many participants' housing choices and outcomes: both the neighbourhood they lived in and the type and quality of dwelling they were occupying. With regard to the most important barrier—low incomes versus high rental costs—participants noted:

In our country we are well educated in everything, [but when] we come here we are nothing... with my job [salary], it is very difficult to run the family [household expenses], much less to pay the high rents out there... [which are] not [within] my budget. We finished by renting a two-bedroom basement suite [\$900/month], [which was] much less expensive than renting an apartment.

Some would say it's cheaper to rent in Surrey then elsewhere... true... it's cheaper to rent here than in Vancouver, where you have to pay \$1,800 to rent... yes, but only if it fits your budget [household income]... If not, which is my case, we have to make a lot of sacrifices to survive by renting housing that I never thought I would one day live in.... My apartment is 51 years old... anything there is old and the area is not safe [drugs]... Surrey has everything, but some of its housing needs to be upgraded [too old in need of repairs] and some neighbourhoods need to improve and become safer... more working together as neighbours... more "Neighbourhood Watch."

On the lack of in-depth and reliable housing information about the local rental housing markets, including limited housing services and programs, some participants noted:

Look how big the city of Surrey is. As a new immigrant, how should I know where to find jobs... to find the right people and organizations to help find housing that I can afford? I looked at the newspapers, but I got lost... too many calls without answers... it's discouraging... Landlords should trust more immigrants because they pay the rents.

If you are sponsored by the government [refugees] you get a lot of help with housing... We don't. We are on our own here. The government should invest more in housing... For large families, there is a large demand of subsidized housing.

We are too dispersed in Surrey... we need more help and guidance from settlement workers... not only finding housing, but also dealing with the landlords. They are the ones who know the city well.

### *Sources Used*

Roughly two-thirds of the participants in Surrey and Richmond used several sources or methods in looking for their permanent residence. These were, in order of importance: (a) relatives, (b) friends, (c) local newspapers or the Internet, and (d) driving around the city looking for rental signs. Overall, less than one-third of participants in both cities used mainstream private or non-private market organizations or institutions when looking for their present residence.

Although there are immigrant settlement agencies in both Surrey and Richmond that provide immigrants with a range of services and information (including ESL/language upgrading, information on the labour market, an explanation of the employment search process, help preparing résumés and cover letters, interview skills training), very few of these organizations specialize in housing services, such as providing information to new immigrants about the complex local real estate markets. One of the exceptions is OPTIONS Immigrant Settlement Services in Surrey, which helps individuals, including immigrants, find rental accommodation. It also assists landlords in finding new tenants in Surrey. OPTIONS publishes an online housing registry that offers up-to-date listings of rental units available in the city. Few other organizations provide such specialized services to newcomers.

Some organizations in Surrey and Richmond (e.g., SUCCESS ) organize "housing workshops" to help newcomers to the city look for accommodation. However, the limited number of housing services and programs available

cannot accommodate the needs of a steadily growing population with special housing needs and preferences as well as affordability problems. There is, thus, an urgent need to increase the number of organizations specializing in housing services and programs to new immigrants in both cities.

### *Housing Discrimination*

In comparison with other industrialized countries (e.g., the U.S., the U.K., or France), Canada appears to have a more “open,” less constrained housing market (Hulchanski and Shapcott, 2004; Murdie, 2003). However, with the growing suburbanization of immigration in Canada, the extent to which this image corresponds with reality, particularly in the outer suburbs of major metropolitan areas, remains to be studied.

Some participants in the focus groups revealed that on several occasions they were “not welcomed,” and thus felt discriminated against, by landlords when they were inquiring about and/or looking for rental housing. On this hot-button issue participants noted:

They [landlords] take advantage of us because we are new landed immigrants... we don't know how things are run here... My landlord said they were going to raise the rent and didn't explain why. Then we had to move because we couldn't afford [it].

If it was not for my church, I would not be living where I am now.... I have three children and if you have a large family, the landlords are afraid to rent [to you]... For them, too many people causes problems... We need more housing for large families.

When you go to rent they ask: “Where do you come from? Are you working? Do you have good credit?” And they check it... They are afraid we would not pay the rent. My landlord told me that one Canadian didn't pay the rent and left... so I think they are more cautious with us foreigners.

I have asthma. So I am suffering from the carpet, which is very dusty... it's very old and dirty. I can't live with dirty things around. So the first time when I talked to the landlord and I asked if he could change it, he said you have to pay an extra \$100 each month. I said no... I can't afford and now I have to use an inhaler. He was not helpful... He simply wants to make money and they [landlords] know that we don't know our rights.

More education is needed to ensure that landlords respect tenants' rights, accept cultural differences, and are flexible in accommodating immigrants' housing needs and preferences. It is also important to raise immigrants' awareness of their rights and obligations as tenants. Within this context, settlement organizations and housing service providers have an important role to play as a bridge between landlords and renters. More housing service programs, including housing workshops, would help increase immigrants' knowledge about housing-specific issues in today's complex, expensive housing markets.

Given the limited supply of affordable housing, landlords have more power to screen which immigrants will get rental accommodation, what neighbourhoods they will live in, and at what price. By promoting social exclusion and by directing certain immigrant groups, including refugees and visible minorities, to low-quality housing in low-income neighbourhoods, this type of discrimination thus has the potential to shape urban space in Surrey and Richmond. More research is needed on the role of landlords as well as other social gatekeepers (e.g., builders, developers, planners, politicians, housing providers, and housing managers) in the outer suburban rental housing markets in major Canadian metropolitan areas.

*Coping Strategies*

The most common methods participants used to deal with the expensive rental housing market were sharing accommodation with relatives or friends, and/or renting low-quality housing (e.g., basements, old apartments). About one-third of the participants in Surrey and Richmond were in a situation in which five or more people lived in the same dwelling (Table 4). In addition, 32% of participants in Surrey and 16% in Richmond declared they were living in overcrowded conditions. Many participants didn't view overcrowding as a "problem," however, because they were used to such housing conditions in their home countries and cultures.

Focus group participants were asked whether they thought homelessness was a major issue or not in the local immigrant communities of Surrey and Richmond. Very few participants agreed that immigrant groups are at risk of becoming homeless. A common rationale offered for this was that immigrants, in order to overcome the numerous barriers they encounter in the rental housing market, work very hard and try to find solutions through "family sacrifices" (e.g., taking two jobs, sharing housing to save money, renting low-quality housing, living frugally). As one participant noted, "We are not here to depend on money from the government...we came to build a future in Canada." Most participants expressed a strong conviction that once they got a job commensurate with their qualifications—"a job that pays"—they would be able to improve their housing conditions. Another participant said, "Housing is just the tip of the iceberg... we want jobs that pay, then we can deal with the problem [housing costs]." Another participant added, "We do it [make sacrifices] because of our children... their future is here."

**TABLE 4: CURRENT HOUSING CONDITIONS AND RESIDENTIAL SATISFACTION**

	SURREY (N=56)	RICHMOND (N=32)
<b>HOUSEHOLD</b>		
Married/common-law couple/with children	46%	38%
Married/common-law couple/no children	11%	22%
One person	11%	13%
One adult w/children	11%	9%
Two or more unrelated persons	4%	9%
Other	18%	9%
<b>NUMBER OF PERSONS/CURRENT DWELLING</b>		
One person	7%	13%
Two	14%	28%
Three	25%	22%
Four	16%	6%
Five or more	38%	31%
<b>DWELLING CROWDING</b>		
Overcrowded	32%	16%
Comfortable enough room	68%	75%
Too big for current household	--	9%
<b>DWELLING CONDITIONS</b>		
Good repair	50%	63%
Needs minor repairs	21%	28%
Needs major repairs	29%	9%
<b>SATISFACTION WITH DWELLING</b>		
Very dissatisfied/Somewhat dissatisfied	57%	44%
Very satisfied/Somewhat satisfied	43%	56%
<b>SATISFACTION WITH NEIGHBOURHOOD</b>		
Very dissatisfied/Somewhat dissatisfied	46%	28%
Very satisfied/Somewhat satisfied	54%	72%
<b>FUTURE MOVES/NEXT FIVE YEARS</b>		
Yes	48%	56%
Don't Know	2%	9%

Source: Questionnaire Survey, Focus groups, 2010

### *Satisfaction with Residence and Neighbourhood*

Half of the participants in Surrey said that their dwelling “needs minor or major repairs,” compared with about one-third of those in Richmond. Participants from Surrey also showed higher levels of dissatisfaction (Table 4) with their present residence and neighbourhood than participants in Richmond. Dissatisfaction with a dwelling’s quality, size (usually too small to comfortably

accommodate the participant's family), and the lack of safety in certain neighbourhoods were reasons most often cited by participants in Surrey.

When focus group participants were asked whether they intended to move in the near future, half of the participants in both cities said they aspired to move in the next five years to improve the quality and/or size of their dwelling, if possible in a better neighbourhood (e.g., safer and with better accessibility to schools and public transportation and with more services) (see Table 4).

## HOUSING RECOMMENDATIONS

Resilience and a spirit of sacrifice allow immigrants to overcome forms of poverty and hidden homelessness in the outer suburbs of Vancouver. The question is how long they will be able to cope with the difficulties they encounter every day in the outer suburbs.

Fifteen key stakeholders, including service providers in Vancouver, Richmond, and Surrey, were invited to comment on the major barriers and needs new immigrants face in Surrey and Richmond's housing rental markets and to make recommendations on what should be done to improve housing opportunities, including housing services and programs for newcomers. These stakeholder comments and suggestions have been grouped by theme.

### *Housing Affordability and the Need for a National Housing Policy*

All key informants agreed that housing affordability is by far the major challenge facing recent immigrants, including refugees, in the cities of Surrey and Richmond. A high demand for housing and an increase in housing costs in the rental and homeownership sectors in the last few years has contributed to a housing crisis in these cities, particularly among the new immigrant population, putting many recent immigrants at risk of homelessness. Low incomes,

combined with the larger-than-usual size of their families, increase the demand for affordable rental housing currently in scant supply in both cities. The overwhelming predominance of owner-occupied housing in both cities exacerbates the affordability issue. However, as some of our key informants noted, the causes of this housing crisis, particularly in the rental housing sector, are complex.

Surrey and Richmond have become important ports of entry for new immigrants and refugees arriving in B.C. This increase in the number and the cultural diversity of Surrey and Richmond's immigrants was underlined by many key informants. Key informants saw immigrants as key "agents of change" contributing to the evolving ethno-cultural face of their diverse neighbourhoods. In the words of the manager of a major immigrant service organization with offices in Surrey and Richmond,

What we find in Richmond is that those that are accessing our [settlement] services there are coming from higher socioeconomic backgrounds... but there are a growing number of low-income immigrants settling in the city... predominantly the Somalis, some Spanish-speaking refugees from Central America. There is also a small Muslim community there. But by and large, the dominant ethno-cultural community is the Chinese... In the case of Surrey, [this] is driven primarily by the housing situation... so there's far more affordable housing in Surrey than there is in Richmond, so the ethnocultural makeup of the city is more diverse than in Richmond... We are seeing large numbers of South Asians, Koreans, and refugee claimants—close to 45% of all refugees are now settling in Surrey. And so we are really beginning to see, over the last five years, specific enclaves that are quite distinct from what we see in Richmond. We are seeing much more poverty, food security issues, and challenges in the school system with at-risk youth, than we are seeing in Richmond.

On this polarization that characterizes both cities today, another key informant—a social worker from Surrey—observed:

They [residents of Surrey and Richmond] are not the same... we have China [Chinese living in Richmond] and we have India [East Indians living in Surrey] and the river [Fraser] that divide them. So basically they don't want to mix.

This social polarization is also reflected in immigrants' housing needs as well as in the challenges/barriers they may face when looking for affordable housing. Speaking to the current housing situation, one key informant noted:

I am making broad generalizations. There's all sorts of diversity in Richmond... but generally speaking, because of the higher socioeconomic backgrounds of new immigrants that have settled in Richmond, they have far more opportunities to purchase homes, apartments, and such. So their purchasing power has provided them with greater degrees of housing security. Now in Surrey, the case is almost the opposite extreme. We are finding many more new immigrants in the rental market, and less on the purchasing side. We are also seeing a much higher concentration of lower socioeconomic neighbourhoods that have formed over the past decade... but the infrastructure of the rental market in both Surrey and Richmond is very limited. The amount of subsidized housing, BC Housing—is virtually non-existent... We have insufficient amounts of quality, affordable rental housing.

A government housing official also commented on the shortage of affordable housing and how it may impact immigrants' housing experiences and ultimately their integration in Surrey or Richmond:

As prices jumped in both cities, it became more challenging for new immigrants... not enough stock being built and not enough for entry-level housing. With no new rental stock being built what is sealing that void is condominiums, yet for many immigrant families arriving [the large ones], is that a suitable type?... Not enough purpose-built rental housing has been built except for a handful of new projects. Most of the rental stock

has ceased to be built for the last 15 years and this has driven up the price and created the non-purpose-built stock basements suites, whether they are legal or illegal... There is a lack of senior government funding and investment in family housing. There is an apparent gap, especially if you are bringing in new immigrants with families. Where would you house them affordably?... So a lack of housing alternatives in these two cities means that immigrants rent for higher prices... It comes down to sheer lack of supply of rental housing.... In a lot of cases, basement suites are the only truly affordable rental units available.

According to some key informants, the numerous constraints facing new immigrants and refugees in Surrey and Richmond's rental housing markets are contributing to the creation and maintenance of racial and ethnic segregation. A settlement agency manager from Vancouver observed:

My fear is that as more and more immigrants come in, we have these accelerated demographic shifts... In some cases, the ethnic ghettos are forming, which nobody really wants to talk about...but you could argue that there are distinct pockets of ethnic ghettos that are forming, where individuals are stuck in these lower economic situations and they don't have the mobility to move... I can see this in areas of Vancouver, Surrey, less in Richmond... and more leadership at all levels of government [is] needed... social policy has a distinct role to play.

Given these limitations, one of the key informants quoted above recommended the following:

First and foremost, we need to have a national housing strategy, which we once did, decades ago. We are one of the only industrialized countries that do not have a national housing strategy... that is a huge need and a growing gap.

At the same time, many key informants recognized innovative policy making at the municipal level (e.g., Metro Vancouver, cities of Surrey and Richmond). Some noted, for example, the strategic partnerships with local

business/the private sector and other branches of government that are under way and could make a critical difference. Some key informants also underlined the fact that support from the Province of British Columbia (e.g., B.C. Housing) has been strong, but that support from the federal government, in its present form, is lacking. In the face of these constraints, key informants advocated not only increased intergovernmental cooperation, but also for the private sector (e.g., the construction industry and developers) to play a more active role in creating affordable housing.

The following quotations highlight numerous ways in which local governments can help meet the housing needs of their populations. A planner from Richmond observed:

We have a major barrier by not having a national affordable housing strategy... I think there is a disconnected linkage between accountability from senior local government and then the offload of responsibility placed upon municipalities.... We depend on our own affordable housing strategy plan—inclusionary housing.... There is an issue of funding.... We had to resort to private-sector sponsorship. So we depend on developers either to make cash-in-lieu contributions or develop a certain number of affordable housing units based on the size of the development.... We are researching development cost charges incentives for a grant incentive... We don't have the funding or capacity that a senior level of government would... [but] we are a city of peoples from all over the world and affordable housing is a concern for us.

A planner from Surrey added:

I think it is a national issue [housing].... The City of Surrey is on board with the regional affordable housing strategy that came out of Metro Vancouver... it is a first that the politicians in Metro Vancouver have all come on board around [the] housing affordability issue... It is more of a challenge here [Surrey] than it is anywhere else in the country, so we tend to be far away from Ottawa.... With the regional affordable housing strategy, the Metro

Vancouver municipalities are coming together to deal with this and with all three levels of government.... In Surrey, we are looking at partnerships [government and private/non-private sectors] and in different capacities.

In sum, key informants agreed that the housing crisis affecting Surrey and Richmond—a limited supply of affordable rental housing paralleled with the high cost of living for many new immigrants and refugees—makes these two cities a unique and challenging region of Vancouver in which to settle. Key informants suggest that more funding from all levels of government (federal, provincial, and local)—both for-profit and non-profit—is urgently needed. This could include: (a) funding affordable housing construction (to rent or buy), (b) regulating and cooperating with developers and builders on issues related to flexible zoning, increasing density bonusing, working on land partnerships, waiving property taxes, (c) facilitating dialogue between landlords and renters, or (d) supporting local community organizations that provide housing help. Key informants also agree that there is a need for the government to adopt housing policies and strategies that address the uniqueness of the new population in the outer suburbs—one that includes an increasingly culturally diverse immigrant population, in which many are members of visible minorities as well as refugees.

#### *Hidden Homelessness and Discrimination: At What Price?*

Key informants note that there are already signs of homelessness or actual homelessness paralleling the lack of affordable housing in the region. In the words of a government housing official:

Whether it is couch surfing or hidden poverty, you can actually see visible signs of actual homelessness in both cities partly.... One can argue that this is a sign that both cities are growing up... what is also a bad sign is that they are reaching maturity and you now have visible signs of homeless-

ness. But I think it is getting bigger and it is also reaching some immigrant groups.... It's only the tip of the iceberg... [and] the coping mechanisms are no longer working.

Speaking to the issue of homelessness and its ramifications in both cities, the manager of a settlement agency concurs with the above key informant:

There is more homelessness in Surrey than in Richmond because of the characteristics and the makeup of the population—the immigrant population—but it is still hidden homelessness. What we find, particularly in Surrey, are families coming together, couch surfing or sharing a basement or renting an apartment with many people, so there is hidden homelessness *within* the immigrant population... but you are less likely to see them on the street, on the pavement. It is more a form of hidden homelessness phenomenon, but it does exist... This recent downturn in the economy—the economic recession—has exacerbated that issue.

A community worker provides her own perspective on immigrants' coping strategies with regard to hidden homelessness:

What I see is that [in] the immigrant population there are very few homeless. They are very family oriented; they know they are here to make a better life for them, so they help each other.... I don't want to generalize, but my experience tells me that certain immigrants are more able to live together and share accommodation—like the Chinese, East Indians, and to some extent the Spanish-speaking there [Surrey]... They are more ready to make sacrifices than other cultures... True, in some cases you see these monster houses, some with nice facades, but you don't know what happens inside... Two, three families and you have to make room for them... Overcrowding is common, but okay with them... it's hidden homelessness to me...so you live in a cage but they are not homeless, some would say.

Another key informant added:

The immigrant community has a support system and networks... they are technically never really homeless... they are rarely out of a home. They may

be living in an undesirable place where they may have rats... but they are never, like, homeless.

Key informants generally praised the various coping strategies used by immigrants to adjust to the difficult realities of the local housing markets in order to avoid absolute homelessness, i.e., sleeping on the street or taking refuge in shelters. These immigrants' well-developed social/cultural networks of relatives and friends, as well as some of their cultural traditions (e.g., sharing accommodation, "couch-surfing," holding more than one job) seem to be working well in the new society. In sum, coping strategies considered culturally unacceptable by many Canadian housing providers (such as settlement workers)—including variations of "hidden homelessness"—are often relatively well accepted by the many immigrant groups who employ them as a means of entering the rental housing market. Yet the question remains: what price do they pay for these sacrifices?

The key informants interviewed for this study agreed on the important role basement suites play in the lives of immigrants. Basement suites are an important part of the limited affordable rental housing stock currently available in the two cities. As one key informant—a housing provider—noted, basement suites can create a win-win situation for both homeowners and renters: low rents provide savings for renters, while the same rental income helps homeowners with their monthly mortgage payments:

Basement suites play an important role in Richmond.... Huge...and that's true in the sense of the basement unit and also the informal situation where someone [has] carved up the house into multiple units... In Richmond there are not a lot of basement suites because of the water table, but still you have people creating suites in their home legally or illegally and these are still self-contained suites... It becomes a mortgage helper necessary for many homeowners... and these things are factored into the finance and it

is assumed how much money you can get from these basement suites or units... the building industry acknowledges it and the financial and banking industry acknowledges that this is happening and this will cover the mortgage or part of the mortgage.... Some [landlords] don't declare it in their income tax... it's additional income... but many don't know how much the government would tax them, so they are silent about it.

Another key informant from Surrey, the director of an immigrant settlement agency, observed:

In Surrey a lot of immigrants are buying homes... we have the freedom to do whatever we want on our property.... For example, South Asians are building houses with more than two basement suites with a lot of tenants downstairs so they have, like, three families renting... but they also face a lot of scrutiny from their neighbours... we still have the "mega-house" issue here in Surrey with quite older houses being torn down and mega-houses being built... and the white community doesn't like it... Because they have multiple people living in the same house it is easier [financially] for the homeowners.... I know one that built a 14-bedroom mega-house and they are illegal suites...[for example the Sikh community is building these mega houses]...but the [white] community doesn't look at it as beautiful, because the small houses are being torn down... so [there are] tensions out there. My point is if they [immigrants] are building new housing, how is it negatively affecting the neighbourhood?... so it is an ongoing issue.

With regard to the housing situation in Surrey and the role basement suites play in the city's housing market/infrastructure, a local planner observed:

Most rental stock is secondary suites and the majority of the secondary suites are illegal.... Only 10% are legal.... For many homeowners, renting part of the house is an important mortgage helper... [but] many don't want to go through rezoning and [so they] keep them [secondary suites] illegal.

Illegal basement suites not only make renters vulnerable to abuse by their landlords, but also mean they often live in poor, unsafe conditions. The same planner added:

The majority of the secondary suites are illegal, so when we had the first consultation for the City of Surrey housing plan, the issue of the basement suites emerged and was flagged by some of the people that work with immigrants in the settlement agencies. There were concerns around immigrants because they were not aware of their rights as tenants and they are not protected by the Tenancy Act... so we have stories about landlord abuse and some landlords are immigrants themselves... They [renters] are afraid to complain.... They are afraid to come forward because if the suite is illegal they have worries the suite will be shut down and they may be losing the house.

Key informants believe that discrimination based on race, ethnicity, cultural background, immigrant status, family size, gender or an immigrant's income source remains a key barrier to equal treatment in Surrey and Richmond's rental housing markets. A number of key informants noted how it may affect an immigrant's housing experiences and integration. One social worker from Surrey observed with regard to the African community:

Some areas out there in Guilford, they won't rent out to somebody from Africa. I know some families that have been discriminated against and they won't be able to rent because of their skin colour... Some landlords think they will not pay the rents... often this comes from immigrants [landlords] actually.... I hate to say this, but some immigrants from [the Asian] community don't want to rent to black people. Instead they like to rent to Spanish-speaking people.

A key informant from Surrey added:

On the extent of discrimination, I still think it is a hot issue in the East Indian community... the white community does not want to rent to East Indian people because they think their food smells their houses.

Several key informants recognized that the limited social infrastructure in both cities limited the type of support newcomers could get on issues related to housing discrimination. A refugee service worker from Vancouver observed:

They are quite limited, whereas in Vancouver there is a much greater social infrastructure that new immigrants or refugees can tap into... The government sector should work towards avoiding the biases by landlords. We need to explain to them that these newcomers are people in need... We have a poster outside our office: "Einstein was a refugee claimant"... Education is crucial here.

The shortage of rental housing in the region allows many landlords to impose their own (illegal) "tenure regulations." This usually consists of renting without signing a legal rental contract, a situation that puts immigrants in a vulnerable position. A settlement worker who had previously worked for the Tenants' Rights Coalition observed:

We see discrimination based not only on your race, but also on age, gender, and source of income.... My experience tells me that there are many landlords in both cities that don't declare the money from the rents... They demand cash from renters, they don't sign papers, and don't [provide] receipts, because they don't have to declare. And they can deny that they have a tenant anytime because there is no record... Immigrants [tenants] can be evicted any time because they have no rights.

There is need to rectify this situation with (a) stricter regulatory controls, including the legalization of illegal rented basement suites; (b) dialogue between landlords and immigrant renters; (c) landlord education; (d) regulatory changes allowing enforcement of the law against housing discrimination by landlords as well as by other housing gatekeepers (e.g., financial institutions, housing managers, real estate agents).

*Through the Housing Lens: The Need for More Housing Information and "Housing Specialists"*

Key informants agreed on an urgent need for more community organizations in Surrey and Richmond specializing in the provision of reliable, good quality housing services and programs to assist immigrants looking for rental housing. A social worker argued that the introduction of "housing specialists" into these organizations would be welcomed by new immigrants:

I would say that housing is important for the successful integration of immigrants in Canada. With adequate housing that is affordable, they can [contribute more] to our society. It's a long-term benefit....With the settlement dollar that they are providing for settlement services, housing settlement workers should be appointed. So each organization could have one.... This position would be an in-house expert helping and guiding immigrants looking for housing and any issues regarding landlord and tenant disputes, etc.

All key informants recognized the helpful services that local community organizations have provided to immigrants. However, most of these services are related to language training/ESL, employment information, and job training. As some key informants noted, there is an urgent need to "move behind the current package" of available services by including more housing information and homelessness prevention programs in order to meet the growing demand from recent immigrants and refugees settling in Surrey and Richmond. A manager from a settlement organization observed:

The challenge is that, in some neighbourhoods, programs and services have not kept up to the pace of settlement patterns of immigrants. So we have a real under-capacity of services in certain areas of Surrey and Richmond.... There are some proactive initiatives happening now, but much more is needed.

Key informants suggested that more funding from all levels of government should be available to community organizations to provide more extensive housing services and culturally oriented programs to new immigrants. One key informant noted:

There are no government funded immigrant service agencies that are provincially funded that are focused on the issue of housing [services]... Usually all sorts of other issues are addressed by these organizations, from language to employment to family separation to children at risk... but there are no services that are solely designated to looking through the housing lens. We would recommend that the provincial government [put] together some designated funding to create a designated housing settlement worker...multilingual settlement workers that are there to provide directed assistance to the housing focus only. Right now, settlement workers are generalists.

Several key informants remarked on immigrants' tendency to heavily rely on their own ethnic social networks or informal sources (friends, relatives) for housing information, even when this is not necessarily the most efficient approach. One key informant noted:

Especially in Surrey, they are getting more and more newcomers—refugees or immigrants—and they are confused. They need a lot of support, at least at the very beginning. Newcomers are getting support from other members of their communities. [One] problem with this is people can help based on their own [housing] experiences and knowledge... [but] it may not be the best or the shortest or the fastest way to do things. So sometimes they are not the most efficient [means].... The problem is that housing is not the priority when dealing with settlement services.... In terms of government [financial support], the priorities are for jobs and language, followed by some mentor programs.

Recent immigrants face unique barriers and challenges when entering the local housing markets due to (a) lack of fluency in English to communicate with landlords and government authorities; (b) lack of knowledge about housing

laws, landlords' rights, and their rights as tenants; (c) fear of being evicted by their landlords if they complain; (d) lack of knowledge about where to go to get legal support; and (e) lack of knowledge regarding the functioning of the local housing markets in general and, in particular, the mechanisms for accessing non-profit or public housing. Housing experts could play an important role by providing guidance or assistance with regard to the barriers immigrants may face when looking for housing. They could also offer advice on how to circumvent these challenges. On the issue of language barriers, one key informant observed:

Language is one of the biggest challenges for [immigrants] because they don't have settlement housing workers who specialize in housing who can take them to places and even support them [to] sign up for a place. Language is a problem for them, also the way some landlords treat them and take them for a ride. Even when they help with some aspects of housing in the organization... most of the time the social workers are swamped with different challenges, so they are looking at employment, health care, whatever makes a person a human being... so the workers are really stretched... Funding to get a housing support worker or housing specialist would actually help.

Speaking to the housing needs of recent immigrants, another key informant added:

They would love to have someone to help them look for houses, to take them to the houses, because a lot of times they don't speak the language, don't know the areas and, as [is to be] expected, they don't own cars.... So when you have somebody [social worker/housing specialist] going with them [to search for housing] it can make a huge difference.... It's a reference if they [landlords] want to rent—it makes it easier for them because they have someone who knows their rights, so landlords cannot take advantage of the tenants... we should not assume that all new immigrants are internet-savvy.... So I think that it's really important to have somebody to go along

with the immigrant. I think that's key.... In our organization we don't do outreach...we are already understaffed.

Given the major gaps facing settlement organizations with regard to available housing services and programs, key informants recommended that settlement organizations widen their services to provide more specialized, ethno-specific (culturally oriented) housing information and services/programs to new immigrants. Financial help from the government could be used to hire "housing specialists/experts" or "housing settlement workers" capable of providing housing-specific information on local housing markets. These housing experts could provide close guidance through the most important steps of new immigrants' housing search process, including monitoring their housing outcomes.

This housing information and assistance should cover: (a) housing prices and rents, (b) housing types and quality, (c) vacancy rates and locations, (d) the geography of the city, i.e., local neighbourhoods and population, (e) accessibility to services, including public transportation and schools, (f) housing markets and methods (formal/informal) for finding housing, (g) housing workshops, (h) a housing website/housing database available in different languages, (i) legislation regarding tenant's and homeowner's rights and responsibilities, (j) the workings of the financial system (e.g., how to get loans or mortgages, issues of accreditation) and reference letters, (k) how non-profit housing providers and the real estate industry operates, and (l) how to access non-profit or public housing and waiting lists.

## CONCLUSION

While immigrants continue to arrive in traditional Canadian metropolitan gateway areas, recent data from the Canadian Census has sparked significant interest in immigrant dispersal to new destinations outside major urban centres, especially the suburbs. One of the most important consequences of rapid population growth and the recent concentration of immigrants and minorities in the suburbs is an increasing demand for housing paralleled by a lack of affordable housing. Research into the constraints and outcomes of immigrants' and minorities' housing experiences has policy implications for all levels of government.

The majority of the participants in the focus groups used in this study had lived in Richmond and Surrey for less than three years and had come directly to these cities upon arrival in Canada. These immigrants decided to settle in Surrey and Richmond for three main reasons: (a) to live near people of the same ethnic/cultural background; (b) because they had relatives or friends who were already established in the region; and/or (c) housing costs/rents were less expensive. The desire to live close to people of the same ethnic/racial and cultural background and to ethnic networks (family members and friends) thus played a key role for the majority of our participants in their search for housing and jobs upon their arrival in the region. These findings echo earlier research conducted in the outer suburbs of Vancouver (Sherrell 2009) and Toronto (Lo et al. 2010; Preston et al. 2009), showing that new immigrants and refugees feel more comfortable relying on their own (informal) social networks than on formal Canadian sources (e.g., government organizations, NGOs, or professional housing service agencies). Yet despite the numerous advantages these ethno-specific social networks (e.g., relatives and friends

from the same ethnic background) offer new immigrants in the first year of settlement, particularly in their housing searches, much less is known about their limitations—particularly in the suburbs of major metropolitan areas.

In most cases, these participants viewed living with relatives or friends upon their arrival as a short-term housing solution to cope with a number of barriers, chief among them their lack of familiarity with the city, its people, and culture, as well as its complex housing markets. For many, it was a way to save some money before renting their own place. Sharing accommodation was especially important for the Chinese group in Richmond and the East Indian group in Surrey—two well-established communities in the region. These two immigrant groups are also well known as having strong social networks and community structures as well as high levels of homeownership—factors that create opportunities for homeowners in these groups to rent to people from their own ethnic background. An important supply of rental housing in the region thus comes from inside the Chinese and East Indian communities, which helps homeowners in these groups save money to help pay their mortgages while at the same time helping renters in search of affordable housing.

We could conclude from the focus groups that if sharing accommodation initially with relatives or friends had disadvantages for some immigrants (e.g., overcrowding, lack of privacy, family tensions), it also had the advantage of providing the participants with some sort of “comfort zone” in which they could count on help whenever necessary, which made them feel more at home in the region.

In general, participants found renting in both cities very expensive. Most of the participants in Surrey (54%) and Richmond (69%) were spending more than 50% of their monthly household income on housing, putting them at risk

of homelessness. In sum, this is a group of recent immigrants under enormous financial pressure. Not surprisingly, many of these participants wanted access to subsidized housing. In fact, 25% of the respondents in Surrey and 41% of those in Richmond were already on a social housing wait list. However, limited supplies of social housing in both Surrey and Richmond, in addition to long waiting lists for the same, made many participants in the focus groups both concerned and pessimistic with regard to their ability ever to obtain this type of accommodation. The limited supply of affordable housing and its impact upon an immigrant's housing trajectory and integration in the outer suburbs deserves more research by Canadian scholars.

Despite the numerous difficulties (e.g., high rents, overcrowding, bad quality housing) that many immigrants are facing today in the rental housing market, almost all participants (80 out of 88) in the focus groups aspired to become homeowners in the region. More research is needed with regard to levels of immigrant homeownership in the outer suburbs and, in particular, how it was achieved. It is important to identify the different coping strategies (e.g., from sharing accommodation to subletting part of a dwelling) that immigrants use to save enough money to achieve homeownership in the outer suburbs as well as the numerous barriers/challenges they face trying to attain this objective. Such information will help service providers, social planners, and policy-makers better understand immigrants' settlement challenges, housing preferences, and aspirations as well as their adaptation to life in the suburbs.

The nature and frequency of barriers encountered in their housing search can indicate a new immigrant's ability to access housing that fits his or her needs. Many participants in the focus groups indicated that the search for affordable rental housing in Surrey or Richmond was, in general, a stressful

experience. About 72% of the participants in Surrey and 50% in Richmond described their housing search as “difficult.” The most frequently cited difficulties were, in order of importance: (a) income level versus housing costs (rents); (b) a lack of in-depth and reliable housing information about the local rental housing markets; and (c) discrimination or prejudice by the landlords contacted. These barriers seem to have considerably limited many participants’ housing choices and outcomes: the neighbourhood they lived in and the type and quality of dwelling they occupied.

Around two-thirds of the participants in Surrey and Richmond relied on a wide variety of methods when looking for their permanent residence. These were, in order of importance: (a) relatives, (b) friends, (c) local newspapers and the internet, and (d) driving around looking for rental signs. Overall, less than one-third of participants in both cities used mainstream private or non-private market organizations or institutions when looking for their present residence. Despite the existence of some important immigrant settlement agencies in both Surrey and Richmond providing a range of services (e.g., ESL/language upgrading, information on the labour market and the employment search process, help preparing résumés and cover letters, practice in interview skills), very few specialize in housing services or offer information to new immigrants about the complex local real estate markets. The limited number of housing services and programs available is not sufficient to accommodate the needs of a steadily growing population with special housing needs and preferences, not to mention affordability problems. Thus, there is an urgent need to increase the number of organizations specializing in housing services and programs to new immigrants in both cities.

At this stage, numerous other questions remain unclear and unanswered by the Canadian housing literature: Are immigrants aware of the existence of

these formal sources/organizations in the areas where they live? What do they know about these programs and services? Do they receive enough information from the local community, including the various levels of government, about the existence of these services and programs before and after their arrival in Canada? Can language barriers or an immigrant's lack of trust in Canadian sources be a barrier to their making regular use of these information channels, or is it simply the case that these formal Canadian sources do not provide an adequate quantity and quality (preferably ethno-specific) of housing services to satisfy immigrants' housing needs and preferences?

The few studies available in the Canadian housing literature show that – in Richmond and Surrey– there is an urgent need for more organizations to provide specialized housing services to newcomers. Specifically, there is also the need for city-based housing search specialists familiar with the local housing (sub)markets and the social geography of the city who can provide area-specific housing information as well as ongoing assistance and support to newcomers arriving in the outer suburbs (see Sherrell 2009). Lo and her team (2010, i, ii) note that, in the face of a rapidly growing and increasingly diverse population in the suburban areas of large Canadian metropolises, "It is crucial to explore the conditions of services to vulnerable groups." According to the authors, the challenge for policy-makers and service providers is to "raise awareness and improve services delivery in low-density suburbs."

Key informants agreed that the housing crisis affecting Surrey and Richmond—a limited supply of affordable rental housing paralleled with the high cost of living for many new immigrants and refugees (some still struggle to find a job commensurate with their qualifications)—make these two cities a unique and challenging region of Vancouver in which to settle and live. They suggested that more funding from all levels of government (federal,

provincial, and local)—both for-profit and non-profit—is urgently needed. This could include: (a) funding affordable housing construction (to rent or buy); (b) regulating and cooperating with urban gatekeepers such as developers and builders on issues related to flexible zoning, increasing density bonusing, working on land partnerships, waiving property taxes; (c) facilitating dialogue between landlords and renters; or (d) supporting local community organizations to help them provide housing assistance to immigrants. Key informants also agree that there is a need for government to adopt housing policies and strategies that address the uniqueness of the new population in the outer suburbs—one that includes an increasingly culturally diverse immigrant population, many of whom are members of visible minorities as well as refugees.

The consensus among key informants is that, although efforts have been made to welcome more new immigrants to Surrey and Richmond, far more remains to be done to deal with barriers such as illegal renting, the provision of unsafe and poor quality housing, and housing discrimination by landlords. Many immigrant families and refugees in Surrey and Richmond at risk of homelessness face daily discrimination in the local housing markets. This situation needs to be rectified by (a) implementing stricter regulatory controls (including the legalization of illegal rented basement suites) that would serve to address many of the problems associated with unsafe, poor-quality, rented basement suites; (b) creating a better dialogue between landlords and immigrant renters and making landlord education a priority, and (c) instituting regulatory changes allowing enforcement of the law against housing discrimination by landlords as well as by other housing gatekeepers (e.g., financial institutions, housing managers, real estate agents).

Despite the numerous gaps identified by our key informants with regard to the deficient supply of affordable rental housing in both cities and the urgent

need to deal with this important issue as soon as possible, there were many key informants who also recognized some of the innovative policy thinking that is taking place, particularly at the municipal level (e.g., Metro Vancouver, cities of Surrey and Richmond). Some noted, for example, strategic partnerships with the private sector and other branches of government that are under way. Some key informants also underlined the fact that support from the Province of British Columbia (e.g., B.C. Housing) has been strong, but that support from the federal government is, in its present form, lacking. In fact of some of these constraints, key informants have advocated not only for increased intergovernmental cooperation but also for the private sector (e.g., the construction industry and developers) to play a more active role in affordable housing.

Key informants also agreed on the urgent need for more community organizations in Surrey and Richmond specializing in the provision of reliable, good quality, housing services and programs to better assist immigrants looking for rental housing.

As some key informants noted, there is an urgent need to “move beyond the current package” of available services by including more housing information and homelessness-prevention programs in order to meet the growing demand from recent immigrants and refugees settling in Surrey and Richmond. Key informants suggested that more funding from all levels of government should be available to community organizations to provide more extensive housing services and culturally oriented programs to new immigrants.

Given the major gaps facing settlement organizations with regard to available housing services and programs, key informants recommended that settlement organizations widen their services to provide more specialized, ethno-

specific (culturally oriented) housing information and services/programs to new immigrants. Financial help from the government could be used to hire “housing specialists” or “housing settlement workers” capable of providing housing-specific information on local housing markets. These housing experts could provide close guidance through the most important steps of new immigrants’ housing search processes, including monitoring housing outcomes.

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