

Key Barriers in Healthcare Experienced by Calgary Immigrants

Findings from the Co-design of ADAPT - A Doctor's Appointment Prep Tool

Immigrants usually start off healthier than the general population, but as time goes on, their health often gets worse. There are many reasons for this, including language barriers, cultural differences, and figuring out how to use a new healthcare system.

We are four medical students from the University of Calgary who set out to learn about and co-design a solution to the healthcare barriers immigrants face. We collaborated with 14 focus group participants and 3 patient leaders from India, China, and the Philippines to learn about the healthcare barriers that they have faced.

The **main lesson** that we learned from our conversations is that the challenges faced by immigrants are similar to those faced by non-immigrants. However, for immigrants, these challenges are even more significant because immigrants also have to navigate language barriers and pre-existing assumptions about Canada's healthcare system.

Below is a summary of the main themes and recommendations from our focus group conversations.

Theme 1: Communication

- Barriers and experiences:
 - It is difficult to translate and understand medical jargon in native language.
 - Immigrants experience apprehension trying to communicate personal information in English.
- Advice for physicians:
 - Spend more time actively listening to patients because non-verbal cues can help with navigating language barriers and building trust.
 - Write down treatment plans for patients to take home with them.
- Advice for other immigrants:
 - Bring family members for support and translation if possible.
 - Write down concerns or questions down in advance.

Theme 2: Time

- Barriers and experiences:
 - Symptoms can resolve or change during the time it takes to see a doctor.
 - Availability outside daytime working hours is limited.
 - Emergency room wait times are long and often a surprise for new immigrants.
- Advice for physicians:
 - Schedule more time for immigrant patients with language barriers to adequately address their concerns.
 - Offer clinic time slots outside of regular working hours to accommodate working immigrant patients.
- Advice for other immigrants:

- Emergency rooms in Canada often have long wait times (>3-4 hours). If your concern is less urgent, try to contact your family physician or go to a walk-in clinic.

Theme 3: Medications

- Barriers and experiences:
 - Some immigrants obtain medications from their home country because it is difficult to navigate medical insurance coverage in Canada.
- Advice for physicians:
 - Provide clear instructions to patients on how and when to take medications and write down a copy for patients to keep.
- Advice for other immigrants:
 - Ask pharmacists to help explain how and when to take medications.

ADAPT (A Doctor's Appointment Prep Tool) was developed based on the input we received from our immigrant focus group participants. This tool can be used before and during visits to the doctor. It provides immigrants with common questions and tips to help them communicate better with healthcare professionals.

The feedback we received for ADAPT from immigrants and doctors was positive. The tool helped immigrants feel more confident when dealing with healthcare services. Doctors also found the tool useful for all patients (immigrants and non-immigrants) to improve patient-provider communication.