

Guelph Wellington Newcomer Maternity Experiences Study - Summary Report

Guelph Wellington Local Immigration Partnership – May 2023

Overview

A positive maternity experience results from adopting respectful maternity care, which is compassionate and woman-centred care that respects women's beliefs, autonomy, dignity, feelings, choices, and preferences during maternity care. "Culturally Appropriate Care" is care that is aware of the difference's individuals have due to their heritage, sexual orientation, socioeconomic situation, ethnicity, and cultural background. The purpose of the Newcomer Maternity Experiences Study is to understand the range of experiences and intersectional influences that shape the Newcomer women's maternity experience in Guelph and Wellington County. This research was limited to a small group of participants, although a majority, they do not necessarily represent the thoughts and experiences of the entire Newcomer population and maternity service professionals in Guelph and Wellington County.

Demographics

In 2021, 23.8% of Guelph's population (33,780 out of 141,840 people), were foreign-born immigrants. The top three places of birth among recent immigrants living in Guelph were India, Eritrea, and the Philippines.

In Wellington County (less Guelph), 11.4% of the population (10,980 out of 96,245 people), were foreign-born immigrants. The top three places of birth among recent immigrants were the United Kingdom, India, and the Philippines.

According to Statistics Canada, 31% to 33% of children born in 2017 - 2021 had a mother who was born outside of Canada. The share of births to immigrants reached more than 20% in most provinces.

Key Findings

Qualitative interviews conducted at the organizational and individual levels showed the following:

- 88% of participants had a Primary Care Physician, referrals through walk-in clinics and appointments at the Guelph General hospital were still possible even to those without a primary care physician.
- 77% of participants had access to prenatal and postnatal classes through their community centre or clinic, and some one-on-one through their midwives.
- Participant's family members took them to appointments or ended up using 911 services. Only 24% used publicly available childcare services when going to appointments.
- 53% of participants accessed interpretation services during maternity while 35% didn't know about these services and used friends instead or were afraid to ask for language support. Service providers use

translation & interpretation services often, either one-on-one or over the phone with Immigrant Services Guelph Wellington (ISGW) interpreters, depending on the client's preference and sometimes have interpreters on staff to meet the needs of the demography with documents translated in over 10 languages on their website. However, Newcomer women tend to want a primary care provider in their language resulting in many seeking out the services of a few who speak their language which is difficult to get access to.

- 77% of participants were never made aware of any postpartum depression support nor knew how to access these services. 1 or 2 mentioned that they did experience this or knew someone who experienced it but did not know whom to reach out to about it.

Overall, Participants had positive maternity experiences and liked the quality of services provided by their midwives, at the hospital and their community centre. Negative experiences related to differences in cultural norms and language barriers.

Newcomers face many barriers such as difficulty navigating the Canadian Health Care System, isolation and personal finances limiting access to services. In addition to these, barriers to providing Better Maternity Care were identified to be a lack of awareness of maternity services available, lack of language support, practitioners' cultural awareness, service users' preconceptions of care, limited hours of operation, lack of accessibility of services in rural areas and lack of funding.

Examples of best practices include the Guelph Community Health Centre's inclusive programs, the Community Access Midwifery Program that provides pre- and post-natal courses and Public Health Nurses programs that support pregnant parents with vitamins, food, and nutrition programs.

Recommendations

Culturally Appropriate Care through actively recruiting multilingual care providers along with more social services that meet the needs of a diverse demography.

Language Interpretation and Document Translation will reduce the language barriers especially at critical points during labour and at specialist appointments.

Mental Health Support needs to be expanded particularly in other languages and at low or no cost to increase accessibility. This should include campaigns to raise awareness about post-natal depression to reduce the stigma within ethnic communities and setting up community support resources.

Peer-support Groups are essential as they help eliminate isolation by connecting Newcomer women to other women, reduce the rate of mental health issues associated with isolation and promote information sharing.

Community Outreach as well as pre and post natal programs provide access points for women in the community to receive valuable information about navigating the health care system, the health of their baby, and themselves. Practitioners in these settings can also provide key onward referrals to maternity services and supports based on individual needs.

Aggregation of information at multiple access points by ensuring information is available at public places like libraries, community centres and immigrant services where Newcomers go first for information as well as at family doctors, walk-in clinics, and hospitals.

Cultural awareness training for practitioners to have better cultural awareness of the needs of diverse client groups to demonstrate compassion, empathy, and warmth in health-professional relationships.

Program Funding to meet the needs of an increasing immigrant population and a constant increase in capacity in terms of staff and their training as well as resources to help properly support program attendees.

Conclusion

Due to the increase in intake and settlement of recent immigrants in Guelph and Wellington County, the need for culturally appropriate maternity care for Newcomer women is imperative in providing equitable and accessible health care to all. Newcomer women might be facing a variety of barriers including, language, lack of knowledge of local maternity programs, transportation, social and financial in nature. To implement woman-centred care, which is respectful of women's beliefs, autonomy, dignity, feelings, choices, and preferences and result in positive maternity experiences in Newcomer women in turn producing positive maternity outcomes, it is important to consider these women's social position, cultural knowledge and beliefs, and traditional customs in maternity healthcare.

