

# National Symposium on Immigrant Health in Canada

## An Overview

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Ethnicity and migration are recognized as factors that determine health due to biological, cultural, social, and lifestyle factors.<sup>1-3</sup> The most recent census results show that the ethnocultural profile of Canada is increasingly diverse. In 2001, approximately 5.4 million Canadians, or 18.4% of the total population, were born outside of the country, an increase from 17.4% in 1996. This proportion is higher than most other countries worldwide, with the exception of Australia where, in 2001, about 22% of the total population was foreign-born. In the United States, immigrants represent about 11% of the total population.<sup>4</sup> Immigrants represent a very diverse population in terms of ethnicity, cultural and sociodemographic characteristics. Immigrants to Canada come from all parts of the world, although a large proportion of more recent immigrants come from Asia and the Middle East in the last decade (58% in 1991-2001).<sup>4,5</sup>

Knowledge of the unique patterns of health and health care needs of immigrants is currently somewhat limited in Canada. Considering the very diverse ethnocultural profile of the Canadian population, as well as the size of the immigrant population, national consensus is needed on current knowledge and research priorities with respect to determinants of health, health status, and health services utilization among immigrants in Canada. These efforts would help develop more targeted policies and programs aimed at reducing existing health disparities. In light of this need, a National Symposium on Immigrant Health was held on March 25, 2003, in Ottawa, Ontario as part of a broader Conference on Migration and Health. The Symposium was a collaborative initiative among Health Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, academic experts, and the Canadian Population Health Initiative (Canadian Institute for Health Information).

The Symposium was a key component of the national research initiatives on immigrant health and health service utilization. Health Canada, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and provincial partners are currently collaborating on immigrant health assessment research projects sponsored by the Canadian Population Health Initiative and Health Canada. The objectives of this national consultation symposium were to contribute to this important area of population health by reviewing current knowledge on immigrant health in Canada, and by identifying priority research areas and policy needs. In view of the inherent multidisciplinary nature of immigrant health assessment, the complex relationships between social determinants of health and migration, and the international nature of immigration, the symposium speakers and participants included researchers, policymakers, and medical professionals with expertise in immigration and health from Canada and the United States. These proceedings summarize the presentations and insightful discussions, as well as the research and policy directions arising from this symposium.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Canadian Population Health Initiative of the Canadian Institute for Health Information, Health Canada, and Citizenship and Immigration Canada sponsored the National Symposium on Immigrant Health in Canada held on March 25, 2003, in Ottawa, Ontario. The Symposium was held collaboratively with the Migration Health Conference, *Towards a Migration Framework for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, which took place from March 25-26, 2003.

## REFERENCES

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