



Health and Newcomers in Waterloo Region

A Snapshot from the 2023 Immigrant Survey



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Waterloo Region is set to grow to 1,000,000 people in the coming decades. Of the over 300,000 new residents to be welcomed in that time, more than half will be immigrants from around the world. As we grow into the future, it is important that we build a community where everyone can be healthy.

This snapshot explores the responses of Waterloo Region immigrants through to the 2023 Waterloo Region Immigrant Survey.¹ Health was a top concern for at least a third (37%) of survey respondents. This snapshot highlights general insights and presents the findings in table format. It also highlights differences between respondents that live in the KW4 and Cambridge North Dumfries Ontario Health Teams (OHTs).

The Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership prepared this snapshot as a tool to help governments, funders, business leaders and non-profit organizations understand the experiences of this unique group of newcomers and develop and invest in policies and programs that respond to their needs.

We looked more closely at the **568 respondents that said that finding health care was a top challenge**. When compared to all survey respondents, those who said finding health care was a top challenge were:

- 📌 Slightly less likely to be international students (15% vs 20%)
- 📌 Slightly more likely to have immigrated between 1 and 5 years ago (43% vs 35%)
- 📌 Slightly less likely to have immigrated 10 or more years ago (16% vs 21%)
- 📌 Similarly likely to be racialized, have a bachelor's degree or higher, to be female or male, to be living with a disability, or identify as LGBTQ+, or to have an income that wasn't sufficient for the needs of them and their family, or to be in unaffordable/unsuitable housing
- 📌 Slightly more likely to be employed (73% vs 66%)

¹ The Immigrant Survey heard from 1,676 participants in June 2023. Percentages in red in the table below are based on a smaller number of individual respondents (less than 25) and should be interpreted with caution. Percentages based on fewer than 5 individuals were suppressed to protect participants' privacy. See the last page of this snapshot for more information about the 2023 Immigrant Survey.

In terms of their experiences, those who said finding health care was a top challenge were:

- Similarly likely to have accessed health services (83% vs 80%) but much less likely to have rated health services positively (43% vs 62%)
- Similarly likely to have accessed a range of other services and in most cases slightly less likely to have rated services positively
- Among respondents who went to a health provider in the past year and needed interpretation, those for whom finding health care was a challenge were slightly less likely to have been provided interpretation (30% vs 38%) and slightly more likely to have not had it provided when needed (23% vs 15%) or to have brought a friend or family member to interpret because it wasn't made available to them (35% vs 29%)
- Slightly less likely to be quite satisfied with their life (36% vs 42%)
- Similarly likely to have felt Waterloo Region was quite welcoming to immigrants or to have a strong sense of belonging in this community, or to have had a positive experience of settling in Waterloo Region
- Slightly more likely to feel relatively isolated (31% vs 26%)
- Similarly likely to have experienced discrimination (25% vs 24%)
- Similarly likely to not want to stay permanently in Waterloo Region (8% vs 6%)

There were **979 survey respondents from the KW4 (Kitchener, Waterloo, Woolwich, Wilmot, Wellesley)** Ontario Health Team area and **153 survey respondents from the Cambridge North Dumfries (CND)** Ontario Health Team area.² When comparing responses from the KW4 and CND geographies, we see that:

- KW4 respondents are more likely to be international students (28% vs 16%) but CND respondents are more likely to be family category immigrants (33% vs 13%)
- KW4 respondents are more likely to have immigrated less than a year ago (32% vs 20%) while CND respondents are more likely to have immigrated 10+ years ago (36% vs 19%)

² The question about where a respondent lives was not available on the translated surveys. Individuals that responded to the survey in non-English languages were therefore not included in the KW4 and CND analyses. This would have some impact on the findings – particularly those related to language or impacted by lower English language ability.

- CND respondents were slightly more likely to have English as their first language (26% vs 19%). KW4 respondents were slightly more likely to have Ukrainian as their first language (9% vs 3%). Both CND and KW4 respondents were similar in terms of their ability to speak English well or very well (92% for CND vs 88% for KW4)
- KW4 respondents were slightly more likely to be racialized (77% vs 72%)
- CND respondents were slightly more likely to share that they were living with a disability or chronic disease (10% vs 5%)

In terms of their experiences:

- CND and KW4 respondents were similarly likely to have accessed health services (87% vs 86%) but CND respondents were slightly more likely to have rated services positively (64% vs 59%)
- KW4 and CND respondents were similarly likely to have accessed language interpretation/translation services (47% for KW4 vs 44% for CND) and similarly likely to have rated them positively (78% vs 80%)
- KW4 respondents were more likely to have accessed settlement/immigrant services (61% vs 47%) but similarly likely to have rated them positively (77% vs 77%)
- Among those that needed interpretation when they went to a health setting in the past year, CND respondents were slightly more likely than KW4 respondents to have been provided interpretation (38% vs 33%)
- KW4 and CND respondents were similarly likely to feel that Waterloo Region was quite welcoming to immigrants (54% for KW4 vs 51% for CND), to have had a positive experience of settling in Waterloo Region (73% vs 71%), and to have felt at home within 5 years in Waterloo Region (74% vs 78%)
- CND respondents were slightly more likely to have a strong sense of belonging in Waterloo Region (78% vs 70%), though KW4 and CND respondents were similarly likely to feel relatively isolated in the past year (30% for KW4 vs 26% for CND)
- KW4 and CND respondents were similarly likely to have been employed (66% for KW4 vs 62% for CND) and to be in a job that was commensurate with their skills/experience (51% vs 51%)
- KW4 respondents were slightly more likely to report their income wasn't sufficient for their needs (68% vs 63%) and more likely to share that their housing wasn't affordable/suitable (44% vs 32%)

Data Table

The data below explores the responses of subgroups of survey respondents – those for whom finding health care was a top challenge, KW4 residents, and CND residents. Percentages in red are based on smaller numbers of respondents (less than 25) and should be interpreted with caution. Data is not presented where there were fewer than five respondents to protect privacy. Darker green cells have higher values to more easily see differences.

	All respondents	Respondents for whom finding health care was a challenge	KW4 respondents	CND respondents
Number of survey respondents	1,676	568	979	153
Immigration category				
Immigrated as economic-category immigrants	23%	27%	26%	29%
Immigrated as family-category immigrants	16%	19%	13%	33%
Immigrated as GAR refugees	7%	6%	6%	**
Immigrated as PSR refugees	4%	3%	3%	**
Immigrated as previous refugee claimants	7%	7%	7%	3%
Current refugee claimants	3%	3%	2%	**
Current international students	20%	15%	28%	16%
Current temporary work permits	5%	7%	5%	5%
Currently on CUAET visas	11%	11%	6%	**
Other responses, "Unknown" or "I prefer not to answer"	3%	2%	3%	7%
Time in Canada				
Less than 1 year ago	31%	27%	32%	20%
1 to 5 years ago	35%	43%	36%	35%
6 to 10 years ago	12%	14%	12%	9%
10+ years ago	21%	16%	19%	36%

	All respondents	Respondents for whom finding health care was a challenge	KW4 respondents	CND respondents
Geography				
Lived in Cambridge	12%	12%	**	95%
Lived in Kitchener	51%	53%	61%	**
Lived in Waterloo	30%	29%	36%	**
Lived in rural townships in Waterloo Region	3%	4%	3%	4%
Lived outside of Waterloo Region	4%	3%	**	**
First language				
English first language	14%	13%	19%	26%
French first language	2%	2%	1%	**
Arabic first language	9%	8%	7%	4%
Tigrinya first language	2%	1%	3%	**
Spanish first language	9%	9%	8%	7%
Farsi/Persian first language	4%	4%	4%	**
Turkish first language	3%	3%	2%	**
Somali first language	2%	1%	2%	**
Serbian first language	5%	3%	**	**
Ukrainian first language (Includes those that indicated Ukrainian first language and those that filled out the survey in Ukrainian)	16%	16%	9%	3%
Chinese languages as first language	4%	5%	3%	**
Number of languages spoken				
Spoke 1 language	9%	8%	9%	14%
Spoke 2 languages	44%	40%	45%	42%
Spoke 3 languages	32%	36%	33%	27%
Spoke 4 languages	11%	13%	11%	13%
Spoke 5 or more languages	3%	3%	3%	4%

	All respondents	Respondents for whom finding health care was a challenge	KW4 respondents	CND respondents
English ability				
Spoke English Very well	55%	56%	69%	72%
Spoke English Well	22%	20%	19%	20%
Spoke English Fairly well	14%	16%	9%	5%
Spoke English Poorly	8%	7%	3%	**
Spoke English not at all	**	**	**	**
Services used & ratings				
Education services – accessed	78%	78%	77%	72%
Education services - rated positively	86%	82%	88%	84%
Employment and/or skills training services -accessed	72%	69%	71%	62%
Employment and/or skills training services - rated positively	67%	62%	67%	71%
English language learning services - accessed	66%	62%	57%	54%
English language learning services - rated positively	75%	70%	88%	84%
French language learning services - accessed	40%	37%	24%	27%
French language learning services - rated positively	60%	53%	41%	63%
Health services - accessed	80%	83%	86%	87%
Health services - rated positively	62%	43%	59%	64%
Housing services - accessed	64%	67%	84%	73%
Housing services - rated positively	47%	36%	45%	54%
Language interpretation/translation services - accessed	59%	59%	47%	44%
Language interpretation/translation services - rated positively	68%	55%	78%	80%
Legal/courts services - accessed	37%	35%	36%	33%
Legal/courts services - rated positively	70%	65%	69%	73%
Local municipal government/bylaw services -accessed	54%	55%	54%	57%
Local municipal government/bylaw services - rated positively	73%	67%	71%	64%

	All respondents	Respondents for whom finding health care was a challenge	KW4 respondents	CND respondents
Services used & ratings				
Mental health services - accessed	51%	47%	50%	46%
Mental health services - rated positively	67%	60%	65%	71%
Police services - accessed	53%	54%	54%	56%
Police services - rated positively	81%	75%	79%	81%
Settlement/immigrant services - accessed	61%	59%	61%	47%
Settlement/immigrant services - rated positively	78%	73%	77%	77%
Small business/entrepreneurial supports - accessed	37%	35%	37%	37%
Small business/entrepreneurial supports - rated positively	67%	60%	65%	80%
Transportation services - accessed	85%	87%	87%	70%
Transportation services - rated positively	71%	64%	71%	71%
Recreation services - accessed	76%	77%	77%	75%
Recreation services - rated positively	79%	73%	79%	77%
Childcare services - accessed	44%	47%	43%	37%
Childcare services - rated positively	68%	58%	66%	73%
Interpretation				
Had interpretation provided when they went to a health provider in the past year (of those that needed interpretation in health settings)	38%	30%	33%	38%
Wanted language interpretation but did not receive it when they went to a health provider in the past year (of those that needed interpretation in health settings)	15%	23%	15%	**
Brought a family member or friend because interpretation was not available when they went to a health provider in the past year (of those that needed interpretation in health settings)	29%	35%	29%	33%

	All respondents	Respondents for whom finding health care was a challenge	KW4 respondents	CND respondents
Interpretation				
Brought a family member or friend because they prefer this instead of a professional interpreter when they went to a health provider in the past year (of those that needed interpretation in health settings)	25%	21%	29%	33%
Did not need interpretation when they went to a health provider in the past year	57%	64%	60%	69%
Did not get to a hospital, doctor or health provider in the past year	22%	14%	25%	20%
Life satisfaction				
Quite satisfied with their life as a whole (rated 8-10 on a 0-10 point scale)	42%	36%	42%	43%
Somewhat satisfied with their life as a whole (rated 5-7 on a 0-10 point scale)	44%	48%	42%	42%
Dissatisfied with their life as a whole (rated 0-4 on a 0-10 point scale)	14%	16%	16%	15%
Community welcoming				
Felt Waterloo Region was quite welcoming to immigrants	56%	52%	54%	51%
Felt Waterloo Region was somewhat welcoming to immigrants	34%	33%	35%	38%
Felt Waterloo Region was unwelcoming to immigrants	10%	14%	12%	11%
Sense of belonging				
Had a strong (very or somewhat strong) sense of belonging in Waterloo Region	72%	70%	70%	78%
Isolation				
Felt relatively isolated (a great deal or quite a bit isolated) in the past year	26%	31%	30%	26%

	All respondents	Respondents for whom finding health care was a challenge	KW4 respondents	CND respondents
Safety				
Felt relatively safe (extremely or very safe) in Waterloo Region	66%	63%	67%	59%
Discrimination				
Experienced discrimination in the past year	24%	25%	27%	28%
Most common reason, for those that experienced discrimination	48% - Race or skin color	50% - Race or skin color	62% - Race or skin color	78% - Race or skin color
Second most common reason, for those that experienced discrimination	36% - Ethnicity or culture	41% - Ethnicity or culture	44% - Ethnicity or culture	39% - Ethnicity or culture
Third most common reason, for those that experienced discrimination	31% - Accent	37% - Accent	31% - Accent	27% - Accent & 27% - Religion
Discrimination				
Most common situation where discrimination occurred	31% - At my job – for example from supervisors, co-workers or clients	35% - When applying for a job or a promotion	37% - At my job – for example from supervisors, co-workers or clients	46% - In a store, bank or restaurant
Second most common situation where discrimination occurred	31% - When applying for a job or a promotion	34% - In a store, bank or restaurant	35% - In a store, bank or restaurant	39% - While using public areas, such as parks or sidewalks
Third most common situation where discrimination occurred	30% - In a store, bank or restaurant	33% - At my job – for example from supervisors, co-workers or clients	32% - When applying for a job or a promotion	32% - When applying for a job or a promotion & 32% - At my job – for example from supervisors, co-workers or clients

	All respondents	Respondents for whom finding health care was a challenge	KW4 respondents	CND respondents
Settlement experience				
Had a positive experience (excellent or good) settling in Waterloo Region	74%	71%	73%	71%
Feeling at home				
Felt at home within 5 years in Waterloo Region	74%	73%	74%	78%
Noted that they still don't feel at home in Waterloo Region	20%	22%	21%	14%
Top challenges				
Most common top challenge	59% - Cost of living or money problems	100% - Finding health care	60% - Cost of living or money problems	57% - Cost of living or money problems
Second most common top challenge	49% - Finding affordable housing	62% - Cost of living or money problems	52% - Finding affordable housing	45% - Finding work
Third most common top challenge	49% - Finding work	52% - Finding affordable housing	52% - Finding work	37% - Finding health care
Top suggestions				
Most common suggestion	68% - More affordable housing	69% - More affordable housing	70% - More affordable housing	62% - More affordable housing
Second most common suggestion	43% - Better programs for immigrants to find work	40% - Better programs for immigrants to find work	44% - Better programs for immigrants to find work	41% - Better programs for immigrants to find work
Third most common suggestion	23% - More opportunities to help improve English skills	22% - More opportunities to help improve English skills	22% - More opportunities to help improve English skills	28% - More opportunities to help improve English skills

	All respondents	Respondents for whom finding health care was a challenge	KW4 respondents	CND respondents
Reasons for coming to Waterloo Region				
Most common reason to come to Waterloo Region	33% - I had family or friends that live in Waterloo Region	37% - I had family or friends that live in Waterloo Region	34% - Post-secondary institutions	33% - I had family or friends that live in Waterloo Region
Second most common reason to come to Waterloo Region	32% - Post-secondary institutions	27% - Post-secondary institutions	32% - I had family or friends that live in Waterloo Region	25% - For a job
Third most common reason to come to Waterloo Region	24% - For a job	26% - For a job	24% - For a job	22% - Waterloo Region was more affordable than other communities
Intention to stay				
Possibly staying permanently in Waterloo Region (might stay or definitely staying permanently)	62%	60%	62%	63%
Not sure if they were staying permanently in Waterloo Region	32%	32%	32%	30%
Not planning on staying permanently in Waterloo Region	6%	8%	6%	8%
Age				
Youth (age 16-24 years)	14%	10%	15%	13%

	All respondents	Respondents for whom finding health care was a challenge	KW4 respondents	CND respondents
Race/population group				
Racialized	76%	75%	77%	72%
Most common racial group	28% - South Asian - e.g. East Indian Pakistani, Sri Lankan	31% - South Asian - e.g. East Indian Pakistani, Sri Lankan	26% - South Asian - e.g. East Indian Pakistani, Sri Lankan	44% - South Asian - e.g. East Indian Pakistani, Sri Lankan
Second most common racial group	19% - White	19% - White	20% - Black - e.g. Black-Caribbean, Black-African, Black-North American	23% - White
Third most common racial group	19% - Black - e.g. Black-Caribbean, Black-African, Black-North American	14% - Black - e.g. Black-Caribbean, Black-African, Black-North American	19% - White	11% - Black - e.g. Black-Caribbean, Black-African, Black-North American
Education				
Had a Bachelors or above	75%	78%	76%	72%
Gender Identity & Sexual Orientation				
Woman	59%	59%	59%	58%
Man	40%	40%	40%	40%
Identified as LGBTQ+	3%	3%	3%	**
Disability				
Living with a disability or chronic disease	6%	7%	5%	10%
Faith community				
Member of a faith community	76%	74%	76%	80%
Employment				
Employed (including full-time, part-time & self-employed)	66%	73%	66%	62%
In a job that is commensurate with their skills and experience (of those who were working)	51%	51%	51%	51%

	All respondents	Respondents for whom finding health care was a challenge	KW4 respondents	CND respondents
Income				
Their income was not sufficient for their needs (either somewhat or definitely not enough)	67%	66%	68%	63%
Their income was definitely not sufficient for their needs	27%	26%	28%	22%
Housing				
Their housing was not affordable/suitable	42%	44%	44%	32%

Percentages above are of all those that answered each question.

Data Sources and Limitations

The data for this snapshot comes from the Immigration Partnership's 2023 Immigrant Survey. This biannual, multilingual survey is for immigrants who live, work and/or study in Waterloo Region. It covers immigrant experiences on a range of topics impacting their ability to reach their full potential and contribute to a thriving, prosperous community for everyone. The survey was most recently conducted in June 2023 with 1,676 participants.

In 2023, the majority of participants filled out the survey online. Participants reflected the whole range of immigrants living in Waterloo Region. Two thirds (67%) had been in Canada for 5 years or less, while the rest had been here for longer. More than half were permanently in Canada (57%) and 39% were here on a temporary permit. Almost all (93%) were living in Cambridge, Kitchener and Waterloo, with 3% in the rural townships. Participants answered the survey in 11 languages and had 75 first languages. English was the first language of 14% of participants, 77% spoke English well or very well and 9% spoke English poorly or not at all. A full 76% of respondents identified as racialized; 59% were female and 40% male; 3% identified as LGBTQ+; 6% were living with a disability or chronic illness. Respondents, like immigrants overall, were highly educated: 75% had a bachelor's degree or above. Almost two thirds (63%) were working (full/part time/casual/self-employed) and 26% were unemployed and looking for work.

Survey responses were disaggregated along many demographic lines and analysed to uncover the varying experiences of different groups of immigrants. This profile highlights larger differences related to health. Because of the small numbers for some subgroups, the findings should be interpreted with caution. Additional information can be found at www.immigrationwaterlooregion.ca/immigrantsurvey.

The Waterloo Region Immigration Partnership is collaboration of over 100 community service, business, municipal, post-secondary and ethno-cultural organizations, and residents working together to create the conditions for immigrants to succeed and help build a welcoming, dynamic community.



Building community through immigration

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