

Community Arts Interventions: Newcomer Mental Health & Wellness Environmental Scan

FLOURISH Collective, *in collaboration with*
Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services



Access Alliance
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This environmental scan explored various aspects of community art initiatives across Canada, focusing on their key characteristics, core components, design, implementation, and engagement strategies. Its goal was to understand how these programs addressed the specific needs of newcomers and contributed to their overall wellness. The analysis examined how arts-based interventions helped to mitigate the unique mental health challenges faced by newcomers and their communities. The report concludes by identifying the need for further research within existing programs and services, offering valuable insights to support strategic planning and the development of arts-based initiatives tailored to the needs of newcomer populations.

Executive Summary

This environmental scan was conducted by FLOURISH: Community-Engaged Arts for Social Wellness Collective (FLOURISH) at the University of Toronto Scarborough (UTSC) in collaboration with Access Alliance Multicultural Health and Community Services (Access Alliance) in 2024-25. This environmental scan explores key features of community arts interventions that support newcomers across Canada, including Toronto, Vancouver, Montreal, Calgary, Saskatoon, Fredericton and St. John's, focusing more specifically on mental health and wellness. The findings offer insights and contribute to the growing evidence base on community art interventions as effective approaches for newcomers to live healthier lives and in greater states of social wellness.

The scan reviewed grey literature and publicly available information on websites developed by community organizations providing resettlement services to newcomers. We identified community arts interventions across 41 organizations in Canada—primarily community arts organizations, settlement agencies, community centres, art galleries, and museums—that focused on improving mental health outcomes for diverse newcomer populations. Organizational community arts initiatives were assessed based on four major categories: 1) community arts intervention, 2) mental health and wellness, 3) newcomer population, and 4) evaluation strategies.

Our findings describe the commonalities and benefits reported by organizations. Notable themes include the importance of cultural tailoring, highlighting factors such as language inclusivity, culturally safe spaces, and the active inclusion of diverse populations (e.g. BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities).

Organizations also reported on enablers that increase engagement, such as accessibility and newcomer-specific accommodations. Mental health and, more generally, mental wellness were primarily addressed through the lens of fostering a sense of belonging, promoting collective art-making, and facilitating integration into Canadian society.

However, the scan also revealed limited methods for the evaluation and reporting of community art interventions. Many public-facing (“grey”) literature either did not mention or had only brief references to outcome reports or results. This presents an opportunity to further explore existing or emerging methods for community arts evaluations to support scalability and adaptability to different newcomer contexts and communities.

Key Messages

- **Cultural Tailoring of Community Arts Programs and Initiatives is Foundational to Engaging Newcomers.** Tailoring community arts programs or initiatives to reflect newcomers' cultural, linguistic, and intersectional identities is central to participant engagement. Community arts interventions led by facilitators with lived experience as newcomers support the tailoring of programs and initiatives.
- **Community Arts is a Growing Intervention to Support Newcomers' Mental Health and Social Wellness.** The primary aim of these interventions is not necessarily to address clinical mental health disorders, but rather to promote a sense of belonging and facilitate resettlement. Key activities focus on community building, reducing isolation, fostering resilience, and supporting newcomers' practical needs, such as housing, food security, and employment. This highlights the social determinants of health, and social wellness more generally, as central to a person's health and well-being.
- **Organizations Implement Accessibility Resources and Engagement Support Through Enablers.** Key enablers to engage newcomer communities include language accessibility, flexible scheduling, and transportation assistance. Many organizations offer translated materials, childcare, and support services, creating a safe and trusting environment for newcomers to express themselves through art.
- **Diverse and Integrated Art Modalities Strategically Engage Participants.** The majority of community-based arts interventions use a mix of art forms, with visual arts (e.g., drawing, painting, photography), performing arts (e.g., dance, theater), and literary arts (e.g., storytelling) being central. These diverse approaches help to engage participants and promote community cohesion.
- **There is Limited Implementation of Evaluation and Sustainability Frameworks.** Despite their positive anecdotal and apparent (often self-reported) outcomes, there is limited formal evaluation of the effectiveness of arts-based interventions. While some organizations collect feedback through surveys, testimonials, or follow-up data, few provide in-depth quantitative or qualitative analysis. Despite this, reported outcomes include improvements in coping skills, resilience, and community-building abilities.

Context

Between 2016 and 2021, approximately 1.3 million new immigrants arrived in Canada, marking the largest increase in immigration in the country's history (Statistics Canada, 2019). Migration, however, has been identified as a factor that can negatively affect the mental health of newcomers. Over time, this may result in complex mental health challenges, exacerbated by discrimination, social isolation, job insecurity, language barriers, precarious housing, and cultural differences (Hirani et al., 2024; Ng & Zhang, 2021). Given these challenges and the barriers to accessing public or private mental health services, community arts approaches—rooted in collective art-making, social justice, and community psychology—present a valuable opportunity to support newcomer mental health while also connecting individuals to ongoing resources (Timm-Bottos, 2016; Johnson & Stanley, 2007).

The role of creative arts in enhancing health outcomes is well-established and widely recognized (American Psychiatric Association, 2023; Brownnett, 2018; Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Johnson & Stanley, 2007). The World Health Organization (WHO) has endorsed arts-based programs, emphasizing the ability of the arts to transcend cultural boundaries and engage cognitive, sensory, and motor functions—all of which contribute to improved health and well-being (Fancourt & Finn, 2019).

In Canada, various community arts interventions have been developed and implemented to address the needs of newcomer populations, including individuals living with disabilities, low-income communities, LGBTQ+ individuals, and those experiencing discrimination (Edenloff, 2011; Madison et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2006). These community-based arts initiatives are particularly focused on fostering mental wellness among newcomers (Edenloff, 2011; Lewis et al., 2018; Nel, 2023). Many of these programs are supported by community-based organizations that work closely with these populations. Although these interventions vary in approach, format, and facilitation, relatively few organizations report on their long-term impacts on program sustainability (Edenloff, 2011; Rose et al., n.d.), revealing a gap in understanding their lasting effects.

Between 2016 and 2021, approximately 1.3 million new immigrants arrived in Canada, marking the largest increase in immigration in the country's history (Statistics Canada, 2019). Migration, however, has been identified as a factor that can negatively affect the mental health of newcomers. Over time, this may result in complex mental health challenges, exacerbated by discrimination, social isolation, job insecurity, language barriers, precarious housing, and cultural differences (Hirani et al., 2024; Ng & Zhang, 2021). Given these challenges and the barriers to accessing public or private mental health services, community arts approaches—rooted in collective art-making, social justice, and community psychology—present a valuable opportunity to support newcomer mental health while also connecting individuals to ongoing resources (Timm-Bottos, 2016; Johnson & Stanley, 2007).

Although community arts interventions have been shown to foster social connection, reduce isolation, build transferable skills, enhance self-efficacy, and promote mental well-being (Fancourt & Finn, 2019; Goodman-Casanova et al., 2024), there remains a lack of clarity in defining and characterizing these interventions as delivered by organizations serving newcomers. This environmental scan will describe several organizations across Canada and examine the outcomes and benefits they report on publicly accessible platforms. By doing so, it aims to provide insights into the intersection of mental health, newcomer communities, and community arts—ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and holistic vision for the future of mental health care in Canada.

Objectives

This scan reviews past and current community arts initiatives across Canada focused on newcomer mental health and wellness, identifying their key characteristics and components. It also gathers information on how these programs address the unique mental health needs of specific subgroups—such as refugees, immigrants, and youth—and explores the barriers and facilitators to their implementation and sustainability. Additionally, this report aims to identify gaps in existing research and practice related to the use of community arts for mental well-being. The goal of these findings is to guide recommendations for innovative strategies and collaborative efforts to effectively harness community arts to improve the mental health outcomes of newcomers within diverse communities.

Based on these objectives, we developed the following research questions:

- What types of community arts initiatives targeting newcomers' mental well-being exist in Canada, and what are their key characteristics and components?
- How do community arts programs address the unique mental health needs and challenges faced by different subgroups within the newcomer population (e.g., refugees, immigrants, youth)?
- What are the barriers and facilitators to implementing and sustaining community arts programs aimed at improving mental well-being among newcomers in Canada?

- What gaps exist in the current research and practice of utilizing community arts approaches to enhance mental well-being outcomes for newcomers in Canada, and what areas require further investigation or development?

Terminology

Community Arts Intervention	A broad concept encompassing performing arts (e.g., music, dance, theatre, singing, and film), visual arts and crafts (e.g., design, painting, photography, sculpture, and textiles), as well as journalism and digital media, engaging communities through active participation and co-development of the artwork (Davies et al., 2012).
Mental Health	Mental health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their abilities, learn well and work well, and contribute to their community (World Health Organization, 2022).
Mental Wellbeing	This term can be approached from two distinct perspectives: one centered on life satisfaction and happiness (Diener, 1984), and the other on psychological well-being, which is centered on capacity building and social networks, encompassing dimensions such as positive relationships, social participation and integration into societies (Eiroa-Orosa, 2020).
Social Wellness	The interplay between wellness of the collective and the strength of the relational encounters it engenders (Charise et al., 2024).
Newcomer	Defined as any persons not born in Canada, including immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and non-status individuals.

Methodology

The scan explored various aspects of community art initiatives across Canada, focusing on their key characteristics, core components, design, implementation, and engagement strategies. Its goal was to understand how these programs address the specific needs of newcomers and contribute to their overall well-being. The analysis examined how arts-based interventions help mitigate the unique mental health challenges faced by newcomers and their communities. The report concludes by identifying the need for further research within existing programs and services, offering valuable insights to support strategic planning and the development of arts-based initiatives tailored to the needs of newcomer populations.

Data Collection

Between July 2024 and April 2025, we conducted a comprehensive review using publicly available secondary sources, including the websites of community-based organizations offering arts-based interventions to support the mental health and well-being of newcomers in Canada. To systematically organize the information gathered, we utilized a data collection tool structured into five main sections, each containing sub-sections and guiding prompt questions, as outlined below.

Basic Information	Organizational information such as name, organizational type, date of inception, geographical location, key programs or initiatives relevant to community arts intervention, contact information, type of organization (e.g., non-profit, community arts, research, government), and mission statement.
Community Arts	Information on specific art activities or modalities used as interventions offered by each organization. This includes the type(s) of community art intervention, implementation site of intervention, format of delivery, mode of delivery (e.g. virtual, in-person, and hybrid), duration of intervention, and facilitator(s) implementing intervention. Due to newcomers as the population of focus, additional knowledge was included related to cultural relevance, foundational theoretical or conceptual frameworks used, and goals of intervention focusing on mental health and well-being.
Mental Well-being	Definitions or references to mental health and well-being as key components influenced by arts interventions. Subcategories include defining mental health and/or well-being, examining techniques (e.g., community arts interventions) used to address mental health issues, identifying the specific mental health challenges observed or recognized, and exploring the mental health and/or well-being benefits gained from participating in community arts-based programs or initiatives.
Newcomer Population	Information on characteristics of newcomer populations, including specific newcomer population(s) targeted by the arts interventions. In addition, unique features of identified populations, including age range, gender, and experiences (e.g. shelter experience, food, housing or employment insecurity, accessibility or accommodations), of participants were also captured.
Evaluation Method	Descriptions of the overall success of the program. Categories included evaluation methods used, replicability of arts interventions with other newcomer populations, intervention challenges, and additional information.

The research team conducted a systematic search using the Google search engine. Search terms included “community arts”, “community-based arts”, “socially engaged arts”, “community-based art interventions”, “mental health”, “mental well-being”, “newcomers”, “immigrants”, “refugees” and “settlement” (See Table 2: Keywords and Search Terms for details). The team also conducted independent searches for each Canadian province to ensure comprehensive geographic coverage. The following inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied:

- **Inclusion criteria:** Publicly available information in English, such as reports, blogs, guidelines, or toolkits, from community-based organizations primarily focused on newcomers/immigrants and detailing community-based participatory arts initiatives in Canada with no restriction in time.
- **Exclusion criteria:** Materials not written in English, those focused on Indigenous Canadians, individual and private interventions, or initiatives centered outside of Canada. (See Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for details).

The scan was conducted by two Immigrant Insight Scholar Fellows and a Health Promoter specializing in newcomer mental health. The team used a data collection tool to assess selected organizations. An initial pilot phase involved five trial searches to test the tool. Based on this pilot, the team refined the tool before proceeding with the full assessment of the remaining organizations. For sections where information was limited or unavailable, team members contacted the organizations directly via email to obtain additional details. In total, 32 organizations were contacted, but only four responded within three months of outreach. To ensure consistency and address any discrepancies, the team held weekly meetings to discuss findings and reach consensus.

Data analysis

Following a thematic analysis approach, the team conducted qualitative analysis by systematically developing a codebook. Two team members independently coded the data. Discrepancies were resolved via team discussions and consensus. Key themes related to community-based arts interventions for newcomers and immigrants—including their objectives and reported outcomes—were identified and categorized. This process enabled us to uncover gaps in the available information and provided a structured understanding of the initiatives' characteristics and impacts.

Results

Our environmental scan identified 41 community organizations across Canada that delivered community arts interventions for newcomers and immigrants to improve their mental health and well-being (see Table 3: Description of Organizations). The following themes emerged: 1) Cultural tailoring of community arts interventions, 2) Enablers to support engagement, 3) Mental health and wellness relevance, 4) Evaluation of community arts interventions.

Community Arts Interventions that were discovered across agencies:

Art Modality	Specific Art Modalities
Visual Arts	Visual: Painting, Drawing, Collage, Sculptures, Murals, Clay Media: Photography, Animation, Videography, 3D Construction Textiles: Crochet, Embroidery, Floral Mandala Patterns
Performing Arts	Dance: Ballet Dance, Zumba, Movements Sound: Drumming, Vocal Training, Sound Art, Music Sessions Performing: Play, Theatre
Literary Arts	Oral: Storytelling, Narrative-Based Work Written: Creative writing, Journaling
Physical Activity	Outdoors: Sports, Gardening, Picnicking

Cultural Tailoring of Community Arts Interventions

Tailoring of Themes to Newcomers

Organizations generally employed community arts approaches that incorporated newcomer-specific themes such as migration, cultural transitions, self-identity, self-reflection, belonging, memories of home, and the process of adapting to a new community.

In addition, some arts-based interventions focused more deeply on the unique needs of immigrant and refugee families, addressing issues such as identity displacement, past traumas, discrimination, the preservation of cultural heritage, and precarious living conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic was also cited as a significant factor influencing the themes explored, particularly in relation to increased anxiety and a heightened risk of domestic violence.

Newcomer Intersectionality

The most prominent demographics included youth and women. Additionally, one organization specifically focused on BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) communities, while three organizations included LGBTQ+ individuals. One organization reported working alongside individuals with special needs (e.g., underdeveloped language skills or limited motor abilities) who participated in the community arts program.

Inter-Model Community Arts Interventions

The majority of community-based arts interventions integrated a variety of art modalities within a program or session, rather than one single program focusing on a specific art form. Broad categories included visual arts (e.g. drawing, painting, collage, sculpture, mural art, photography and colouring), performing arts (dance, movement, singing, and drumming), literary arts (e.g. storytelling, creative writing, and journaling), digital arts (e.g. animation, videography, and 3D construction), textile arts (e.g. crochet, embroidery etc.) and physical arts (movement, outdoor play, and connecting with nature). The programs were hosted in community spaces, museums, galleries, and virtually.

Enablers to Support Engagement

Language accessibility

To enhance language accessibility, many organizations offered interpretation services when facilitators did not speak the participants' primary languages. The most commonly spoken languages among participants included Punjabi, Tagalog, Mandarin, Arabic, Spanish, Tigrinya, Urdu, and Farsi.

Facilitation Teams

A team-based facilitation approach was evident in nearly all organizations, offering participants more holistic care and a diversity of perspectives. Organizations included staff and facilitators who reflected the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the participants. Facilitation teams often comprised a range of professionals, including community artists, professional artists, culturally affiliated artists, specialized creative practitioners, mental health and wellness providers, facilitators with lived experience, researchers, settlement workers, social workers, and organizational staff—often program coordinators.

Accessible Program Delivery

Program formats and delivery considered factors such as program duration, timing, day of the week, and location.

The length of arts-based interventions varied widely and generally fell into three categories:

1. **Short-term:** single-day workshops or 4–6 week programs
2. **Medium-term:** 12-week sessions or programs spanning 2, 3, or 6 months
3. **Long-term:** year-long programs or ongoing sessions throughout the year

Most programs were delivered in person. However, three organizations offered fully online sessions, while five implemented a hybrid model.

Newcomer Accommodations

To further encourage participation, some organizations offered additional support such as free art materials, transportation reimbursements, childcare services, and access to external support resources (e.g., housing, employment, food banks, language services, child support, etc.). Across all organizations, there was a strong emphasis on creating environments that were safe, supportive, and empowering. These spaces were designed to build trust, foster open self-expression, facilitate discussions on difficult topics, offer moments of respite, strengthen social connections, and promote a deeper sense of belonging and community cohesion. In addition, many organizations referred participants to agencies that provide English as a Second Language (ESL) classes to complement their arts-based programming.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Relevance

Understanding of Mental Health and Wellness

Mental health and well-being were rarely explicitly defined by organizations; three organizations provided explicit definitions of mental health and well-being, with one aligning its definition with the standards set by the World Health Organization (WHO). However, adjacent terminology was often used to describe wellness as the underlying purpose of their art-based interventions. Community arts interventions generally framed mental health and well-being as an experiential approach, broad and holistic to engage community members (e.g., “Access Alliance incorporated community arts practice as the first entry point for newcomers wanting to experience non-threatening approaches to learn about mental health. Integrating community arts as a first point of entry for newcomers provides an opportunity for them to engage in self and co-regulation techniques through a variety of art making sessions to catalyze their curiosities and self efficacy to seek out greater mental health support. Participants build trust and are able to disclose much more about their mental health and health concerns following attending these sessions.” “We define mental well-being as the sense of resilience, connection, and self-expression that helps individuals cope with new environments and past traumas”). Rather than directly addressing clinical conditions such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD, most organizations focused on fostering a sense of belonging and supporting the resettlement process for newcomers and immigrants.

Concepts Guiding Community Arts Interventions

Organizations guided their approach to implementing community arts programs based on the diverse challenges newcomers face during resettlement. For example, organizations emphasized reducing social isolation, supporting navigation of the Canadian health system, addressing cultural adaptation, fostering resilience, and providing immediate assistance with essential needs such as housing, food, employment, and schooling as key objectives shaping their interventions. Additionally, two organizations focused on providing support for women experiencing gender-based violence, while six reported discrimination (non-specified) as a critical issue to be addressed within their interventions.

Organizations incorporated core concepts into their community arts interventions based on newcomers' diverse needs. These concepts included:

- Creative expression
- Emotional awareness
- Mindfulness and stress management
- Community engagement
- Increasing self-efficacy

Creative expression through the arts was recognized for enhancing opportunities for non-verbal self-exploration, which in turn fostered emotional awareness and a stronger sense of self. Emotional awareness included activities that encouraged the identification of emotions, reflective practices, silent reflection, and the sharing of personal experiences. Mindfulness and stress management techniques were frequently applied to help participants manage stress and promote relaxation and calmness (e.g., focusing on an object or their breath). Many organizations outlined interventions as a community-engagement space, creating opportunities for newcomers to connect with one another, help foster a deeper sense of belonging, strengthen relationships, and develop new friendships or social networks.

Evaluation of Community Arts Interventions

Limited Participant Feedback and Outcome Reports

Organizations rarely reported or publicly shared follow-up or evaluation information from participants or facilitators; thus, evaluation of community arts interventions was generally limited. From the 41 organizations reviewed, only four provided qualitative insights post-intervention, such as participant quotes and video testimonials reflecting their experiences with the activities.

One organization featured a virtual art gallery showcasing participants' artwork alongside their feedback. Another community organization published a written report that included a quantitative analysis of participant feedback using survey data and descriptive statistics. Despite this, several mental health and well-being benefits were highlighted through the insights shared by community organizations. These included the development of coping mechanisms, enhanced resilience, high participant satisfaction with the activities, and strengthened community-building skills. For example, one organization noted that a theater-based intervention provided participants a platform to express experiences of discrimination, which were then shared with a broader audience to help propose solutions. Additionally, the acquisition of new skills was reported, such as in an intervention targeting seniors, where participants engaged in activities like memorizing new songs and performing movement-based dance routines to work on their cognitive abilities.

Discussion

This environmental scan highlights a growing recognition of the value of community arts interventions in supporting the mental health and wellness of newcomers and immigrants in Canada. These programs, primarily delivered by settlement and community organizations, focus on core aspects of migration, including identity, trauma, belonging, and adaptation that directly impact newcomers' mental well-being.

These results reveal the heterogeneity of these community-based arts interventions in implementation formats, ranging from single-day workshops to year-long programs or ongoing sessions throughout the year. Additionally, through a multi-modal approach—offering diverse art including visual, performing, literary, digital, textile, and physical arts—organizations create flexible, accessible avenues for expression that can be tailored to participant preferences and abilities. This adaptability underscores the

commitment of community organizations to address the unique needs of newcomer populations (Wright & Parada, 2021). However, the lack of comprehensive program evaluations limits evidence-based decision-making and continuous quality improvement, even as these interventions are increasingly implemented to support mental well-being among Canada's growing newcomer population (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2023).

Newcomers require culturally responsive mental health support to navigate resettlement challenges, including language barriers, systemic discrimination, socioeconomic instability, and cultural differences (Kirmayer et al., 2011). Notably, the reviewed community-based art interventions demonstrate an awareness of intersectionality by serving diverse subgroups such as youth, women, BIPOC, LGBTQ+, and individuals with disabilities, inclusivity that reflects an understanding of intersecting identities and the varying conditions of vulnerability they may face (Papa & Parmenter, 2025; Williams et al., 2022). It also points to the need for ongoing efforts to include groups that remain underrepresented or underserved. The provision of interpretation services and the inclusion of culturally specific facilitators underscore the importance of fostering a sense of safety and belonging—an approach supported by Barrio's (2000) framework on cultural relevance, emphasizing elements such as availability, language, accessibility, and the creation of culturally safe spaces during program activities.

Furthermore, facilitation teams that combine diverse expertise, including community artists, mental health providers, settlement workers, and facilitators with lived experience, reflect an interdisciplinary, holistic model of support. This team-based approach enriches the participant experience by offering multiple perspectives and comprehensive care, supporting newcomers not only artistically but also emotionally and socially in ways that traditional clinical models may not fully capture. Additional supports, such as free materials, childcare, transportation reimbursement, and referrals to ESL classes, demonstrate organizations' commitment to reducing participation barriers. The emphasis on creating safe, supportive, and empowering environments enables participants to engage authentically, share difficult experiences, and build social connections—factors known to contribute significantly to mental health and community cohesion (Ungar, 2013).

These findings not only outline the implementation diversity of community arts interventions but also the varied conceptual frameworks to address mental well-being. These frameworks expand beyond a strictly biomedical perspective (e.g., targeting anxiety, depression, or PTSD) to incorporate migration-specific psychosocial factors, including belonging, self-confidence, empowerment, and social cohesion—critical elements in navigating resettlement complexities (Lewis et al., 2018; McLeod et al., 2020; Motia, 2023). Furthermore, some interventions extend their scope to address structural determinants of wellbeing, such as housing, employment, and food security, recognizing their foundational role in mental health. This approach not only facilitates integration into Canadian society but also offers long-term preventive benefits and supports resilience-building by addressing root causes rather than relying solely on reactive measures (Bilodeau & White, 2016).

A critical finding emerging from this environmental scan is the notable scarcity of formal post-intervention evaluations among reviewed community arts programs, which may restrict the ability to demonstrate impact conclusively to funders, policymakers, organizations and participants. This gap represents a critical area for future capacity-building. Developing accessible, culturally appropriate evaluation tools could help organizations capture nuanced outcomes, including mental health benefits, skill acquisition, and social integration. Enhanced evaluation could also support evidence-based advocacy to expand community arts funding and integration within newcomer health services. Despite limited formal evaluation, the benefits reported by organizations—such as coping skills development, increased resilience, high participant satisfaction, and community-building—highlight the intrinsic value

of community arts. Programs that provide platforms for addressing sensitive issues like discrimination, gender-based violence, and trauma further underscore their potential as transformative spaces for social justice and healing.

Limitations

When interpreting the findings of this environmental scan, it is important to recognize its limitations. The scan relied exclusively on publicly available information from community organizations, such as websites, press releases, blogs, and reports. Although efforts were made to connect with primary sources, there were limited responses, resulting in gaps in the information collected. To address this limitation, a hand search was also conducted, focusing on specific programs. This allowed us to gather supplementary information from sources like social media platforms (e.g., Facebook, X). However, it is possible that some community organizations offering relevant services were not included in our scan due to the lack of publicly accessible information or the limited duration of the project.

The scan revealed shortcomings in the available, open-access, information, particularly regarding the specific outcomes characteristics of the activities or interventions implemented. This limited availability of detailed information hindered our ability to gain a comprehensive understanding of these programs. Private services were excluded from our search, as they often operate under different models, such as out-of-pocket payments, and typically provide one-on-one, specialized interventions targeting specific mental health disorders. Therefore, our findings do not represent the full range of arts-based mental health and well-being services available to newcomers.

Recommendations

- *Develop and Implement Evaluations:* There is limited implementation of evaluations for community arts interventions. A greater investigation into evaluation frameworks that can be used to measure the efficacy of community arts interventions is required. A mixed-method qualitative and quantitative approach can contribute to evidence-based practice and increase the utility among healthcare and settlement organizations, in addition to demonstrating impact to funders and policymakers.
- *Enhance Language and Cultural Accessibility:* To further improve cultural tailoring and accessibility, organizations can implement external referrals to ESL classes or integrate English learning as part of community arts intervention in a playful and imaginative way.
- *Expand Programming for Diverse Subgroups:* The scan identified youth and women as prominent subgroups of interest, with some organizations focusing on BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities. To enhance inclusivity, arts interventions can broaden the range of programs for other newcomer groups, including men and boys, seniors, and/or specific unreached cultural or linguistic groups.
- *Foster Long-Term, Sustainable Programs:* While many organizations offer short-term workshops or medium-term programs, there is an opportunity to develop long-term initiatives that provide sustained support for newcomers. These could include ongoing arts-based interventions throughout the year or year-long programs designed to foster continued community engagement, resilience, and well-being.
- *Increase Collaboration with Mental Health Professionals:* Some participants may also experience emotional challenges, including PTSD, depression, or anxiety. Increasing collaboration with mental

health professionals and trauma-informed facilitators will ensure that newcomers receive the complementary psychological support they need.

- *Promote Cross-Disciplinary Approaches and Innovation:* The scan revealed that many organizations integrated multiple art modalities, such as visual arts, performing arts, and digital media, within their programs. To further enhance these interventions, community arts can continue to draw inspiration from other therapeutic or nature-based arts (e.g. narrative therapy, cognitive and dialectical behavioural therapy, somatic resourcing, etc.). Encouraging innovation in program design and delivery, particularly through hybrid or online formats, can increase accessibility and reach a broader range of participants.

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Appendices

Table 1: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Study Design	<p>Reports from non profits or government, community based reports, community based project reports, agency public facing website, blogs, practice guidelines or best practice toolkits</p> <p>Published or translated into English</p>	<p>Studies not written or translated into English</p>
Population	<p>Primarily focused on newcomer communities (i.e. immigrants, refugees, temporary residents)</p>	<p>Focused on native Canadians</p>
Concept	<p>Community-based participatory arts initiatives (e.g. playing and making music, dancing and movement, drama and theatre, storytelling, creative writing or visual arts etc.) within community or semi-public settings</p> <p>Outcome measures broadly related to effectiveness, participation, or health and well-being</p>	<p>One-to-one interventions that are not conducted in a group setting</p> <p>Outcome measures not broadly related to effectiveness, participation, or health and well-being</p>
Context	<p>Centered on the Canadian context</p>	<p>Centred on other countries</p>

Table 2: Keywords and Search Terms

AND	
Community arts	art OR arts OR arts-based OR art-making OR “expressive arts therapy” OR “community art*” OR participatory arts OR socially engaged arts OR creative arts OR “community-based*” OR participatory OR creative* OR express*
AND	
Well-being	mental health OR mental wellbeing OR psychological well-being OR mental well-being OR “well-being” OR “wellbeing” OR “well being” OR emotional wellness OR emotional well-being OR health OR happiness OR social* OR wellness OR engage* OR therap* OR belong* or connect* OR isolate*
AND	

Canada	Canad* OR British Columbia OR Alberta OR Saskatchewan OR Manitoba OR Ontario OR Quebec OR New Brunswick OR Nova Scotia OR Prince Edward Island OR Newfoundland OR Labrador OR Nunavut OR Northwest Territories OR Yukon
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Table 3: Description of Organizations

To note, there are numerous community arts organizations that were not captured in this environmental scan. A more thorough search for grassroots organizations and/or organizations not featured can be added to another scan on a similar scope.

Province/Territory	Municipality	Type or organization
Ontario	Greater Toronto Area Mississauga Niagara Region Windsor Hamilton Brampton Waterloo Scarborough Etobicoke	Art Gallery Arts Centre Community Arts Mental Health Settlement Museum Settlement
British Columbia	Greater Vancouver Area Surrey Victoria	Community Centre
Quebec	Montreal	Educational Institution Community organization Settlement
Alberta	Calgary Edmonton	Arts Centre
Saskatchewan	Regina Saskatoon	Settlement
New Brunswick	Fredericton	Settlement
Newfoundland and Labrador	St. John's	Settlement

