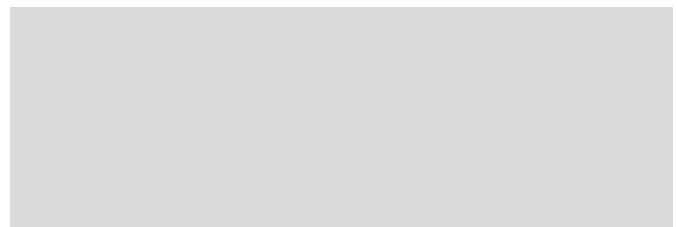


COVID-19: Understanding Client Needs

ISSofBC
December 2020





Background

In March 2019 COVID-19 related public health orders led ISSofBC to close our offices for in-person services. The lack of advance planning and immediate need to provide remote services meant our immediate focus was on stabilizing staff to work from home and providing the necessary tools. Over the following weeks our attention shifted from ascertaining the immediate needs of vulnerable client groups, to better understanding issues of digital access and familiarity among differing cohorts of clients. As planning began to reopening offices to limited in-person services we began to look at longer term service needs, planning for hybrid service delivery to meet the needs of diverse client populations.

ASSESSING CLIENT NEEDS

Our desire to understand client needs during COVID-19 and beyond led us to undertake four needs and assets assessments:



Assessment: RAP Arrivals

- March 25 – May 28, 2020
- 420 family units responded
- Telephone, first language of clients
- Focus:
 - Identify immediate needs
 - Access to technology
 - COVID-19 awareness



2020 ISSofBC Multilingual Client Survey: Understanding Service Access During COVID-19

- July 18 – August 5, 2020
- 1007 respondents
- Online and targeted phone, 15 languages
- Focus:
 - Digital literacy and access to technology
 - Service delivery format preferences



Youth & Young Adults: Understanding their Needs

- July 13 – 31, 2020
- 30 respondents
- Online, English only
- Focus:
 - Digital literacy and access to technology
 - Information needs
 - Service delivery preference



Seniors and Older Adults: Assessing their needs

- September 14 – October 2, 2020
- 226 respondents
- Telephone, first language
- Focus:
 - Digital literacy and familiarity
 - Information needs
 - Service delivery preference



ASSESSMENT 1: RAP Arrivals

About the needs and asset assessment

The temporary suspension of arrivals allowed ISSofBC Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP) staff to reach out to government assisted refugees (GAR) who had arrived in the last 15 months in order to:

- Identify outstanding needs,
- Ensure clients received all identification and supports applied for in the first year, or require assistance in completing 2019 tax returns,
- Assess access and familiarity to technology and social media
- Ascertain familiarity with COVID-19 and public health response,
- Identify most pressing concern.

GAR clients were contacted between March 25, 2020 to May 28, 2020.

Although the majority of individuals were reached by phone (94%), email, text and WhatsApp (1%) were other means of communication.

420 family units responded, encompassing 949 individuals. This represents 94% of the family units and 93% of individuals who arrived from January 2019 – March 31, 2020 through direct destining or self-transfers. The remaining GARs have either self-transferred out or were unwilling to complete the assessment.

This report will focus upon issues of access and familiarity with technology and social media. The full RAP Needs Assessment Report is available at:

<https://issbc.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/ISSofBC-RAP-Needs-Assessment-Final-Report-May-28-2020-2.pdf>.

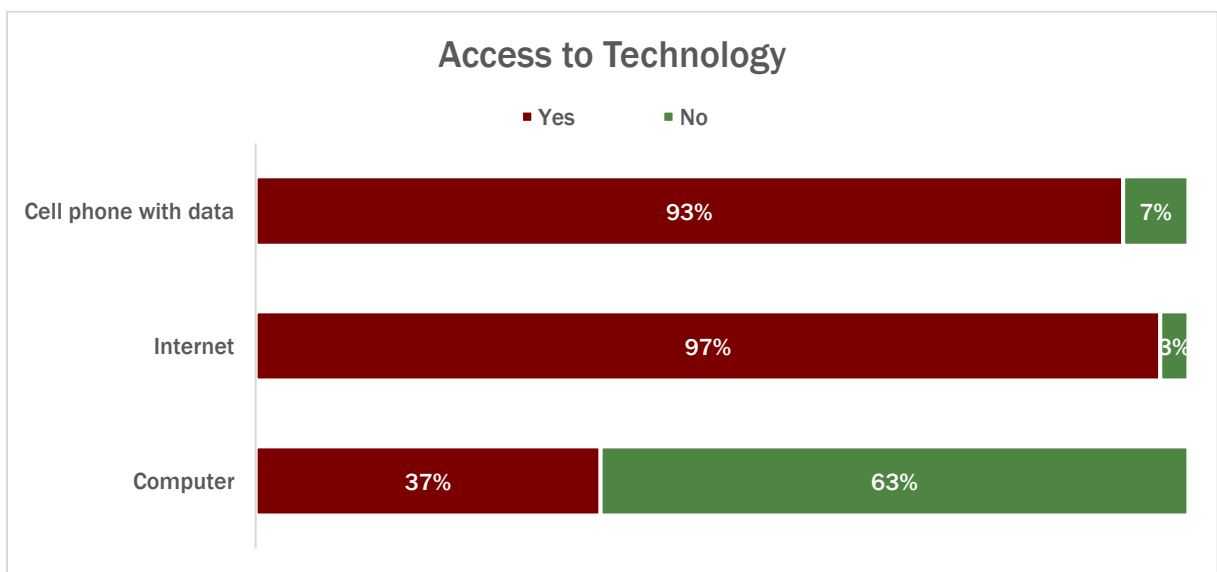
Demographics

- 22 countries or origin
 - Top 5 – Syria, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, and Sudan
- 19 mother tongues
 - Top 5 – Arabic, Farsi, Somali, Dari and Tigrinya
 - 15 households indicated English, French, or a combination thereof are languages spoken in their homes as either a primary or secondary language
- Household sizes of individual responses ranged from single individuals to households of 10 or more people. Over half were completed on an individual basis

FINDINGS

Technology and Social Media: Access and familiarity

- Although 93% of respondents have access to a cell phone with data and 97% have internet, only 37% have a computer at home. The lack of computer access is concerning given remote service delivery in education and settlement services



- Beginning in 2019 newly arrived GARS to BC have been able to access Telus Mobility for Good for Refugees – a program which provides low-cost cell phone and internet access for newly arrived GARS.

- WhatsApp is by far the most popular social media used in maintaining contact with friends and family in Canada and abroad
- Concerns about technology and familiarity were raised. Some respondents expressed concern about the lack of technology given closure of critical supports and shift to online schooling; others whose children had been able to borrow technology from schools expressed concern about a lack of knowledge to support their children when problems arose

Key learnings



Digital Connectivity

High levels of access to internet and cell phones with data are offset by low levels of access to computers

Key social media

WhatsApp is the most social media used in maintaining contact with friends and family





ASSESSMENT 2: 2020 Multilingual Client Survey

About the needs and asset assessment

ISSofBC undertook a multilingual survey to better understand service access during COVID-19 office closures. The assessment was conducted from July 18 – August 5, 2020. Questions focused on understanding: demographics of clients who had accessed surveys; digital literacy and access to technology; information needs; and desired service delivery format and timing.

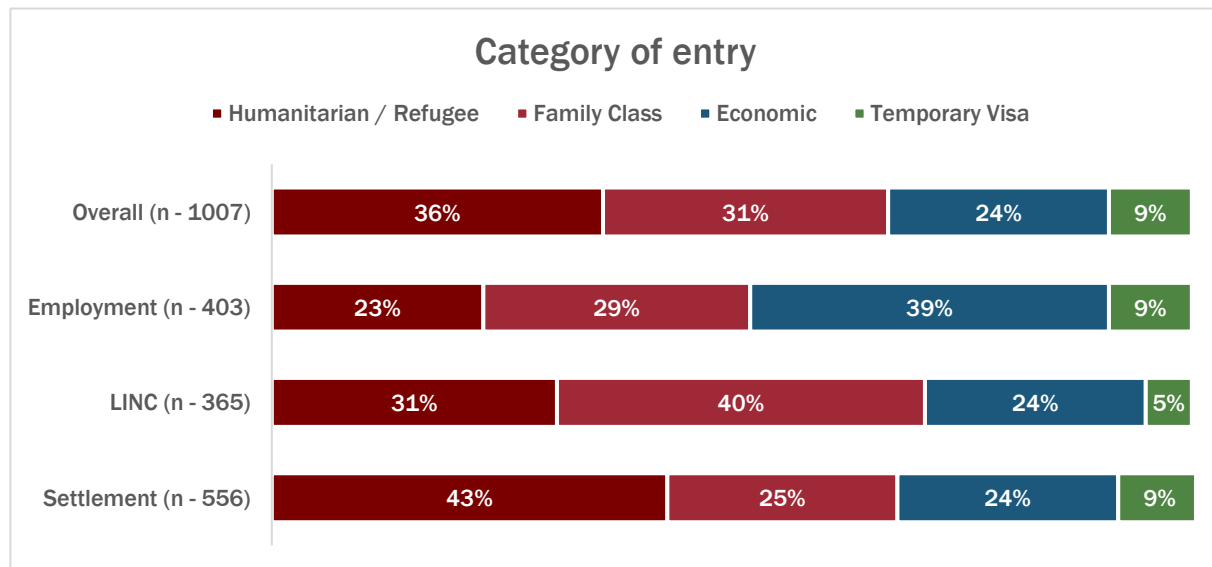
Clients received an email link to the online language survey and were asked to complete it. The survey was available in fifteen languages (including English) using Hosted in Canada survey platform. Targeted phone surveys were conducted with individuals age 55 and older who had accessed services in order to facilitate participation. Clients were contacted in first language and staff entered the responses directly into the online survey.

Questions relating to type of services accessed (Settlement, LINC, Employment) allow us to better understand the profile and experiences of respondents and better plan for future services.

In total we received 1007 responses.

Demographics

- Overall, 36% arrived through the humanitarian / refugee class
 - The profile of respondents varied across business units. The highest number of Settlement clients arrived as humanitarian / refugees (43%). By contrast LINC respondents included 40% who arrived as Family class, and Employment included 39% who arrived as Economic Immigrants.

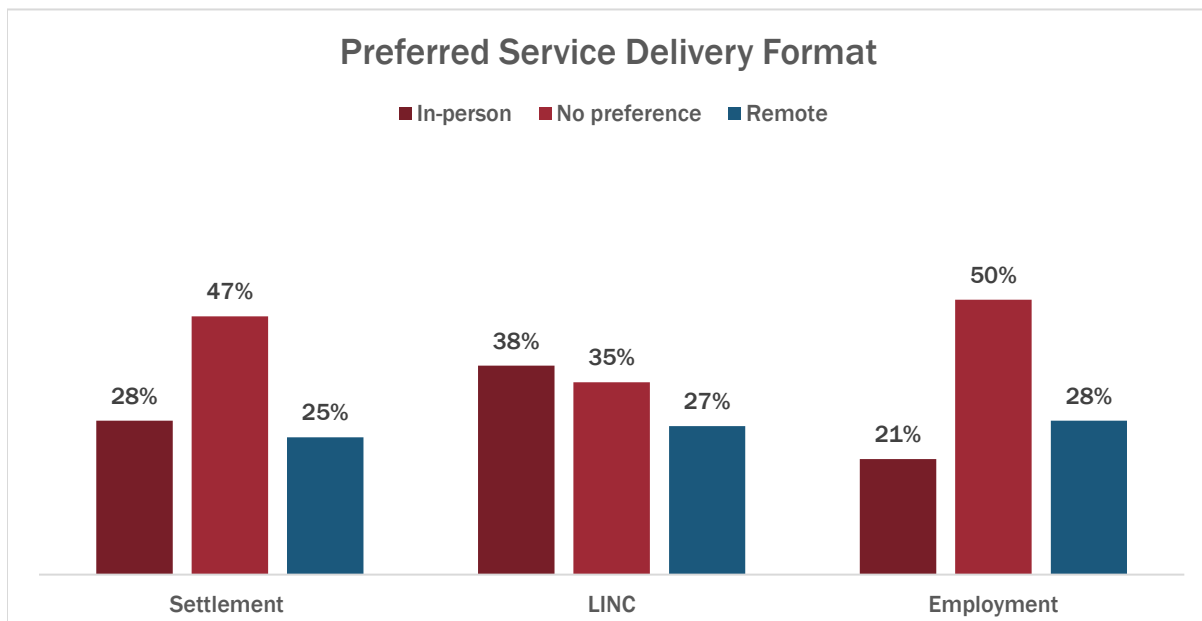


- 65% are recent arrivals having arrived 2016 – 2020
 - 6% arrived prior to 2005
- English and Farsi were the top languages of response, followed by Arabic, Chinese (Simplified), Korean and Russian.
 - Note: surveys completed by staff may have been done in first language and entered in the English language link. Languages are presented here to provide some indication of respondent profile.
- Respondents were asked to identify the office of service accessed prior to COVID-19. Although responses included all offices across BC, the most frequently cited cities were: Vancouver, Tri-Cities, Surrey, Burnaby and Langley.

FINDINGS

Preferred Service Delivery Method

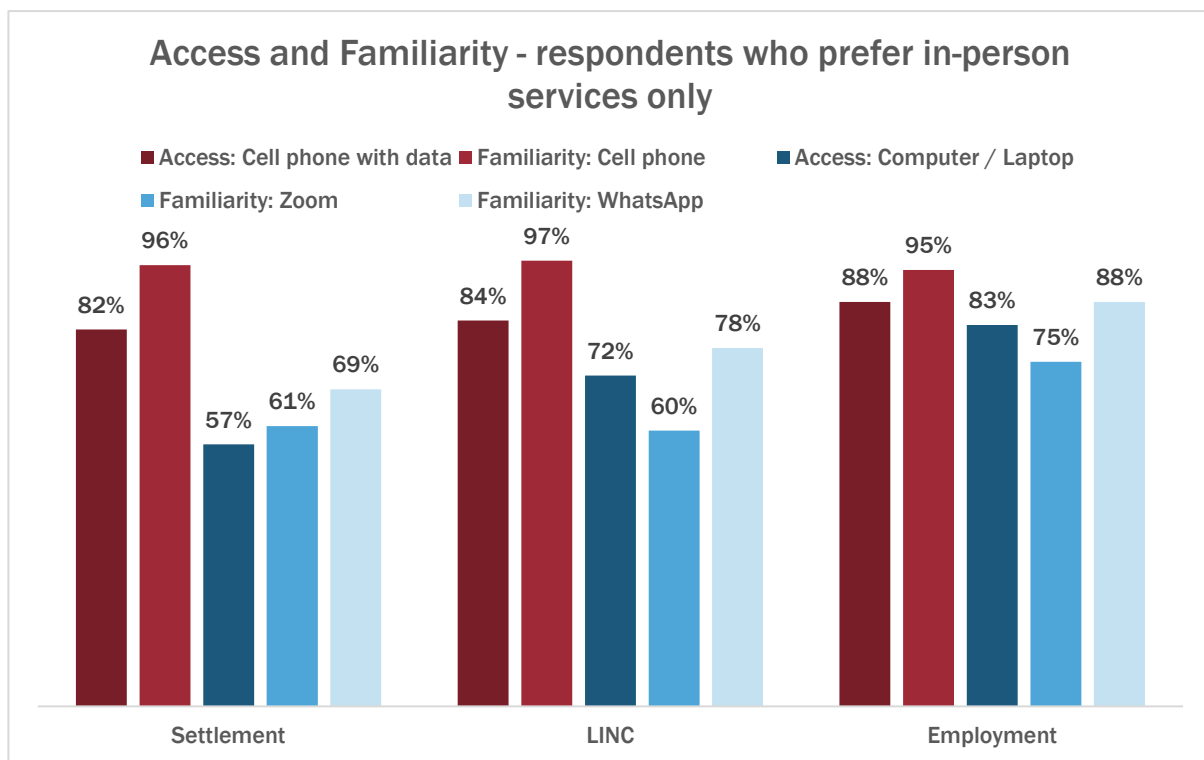
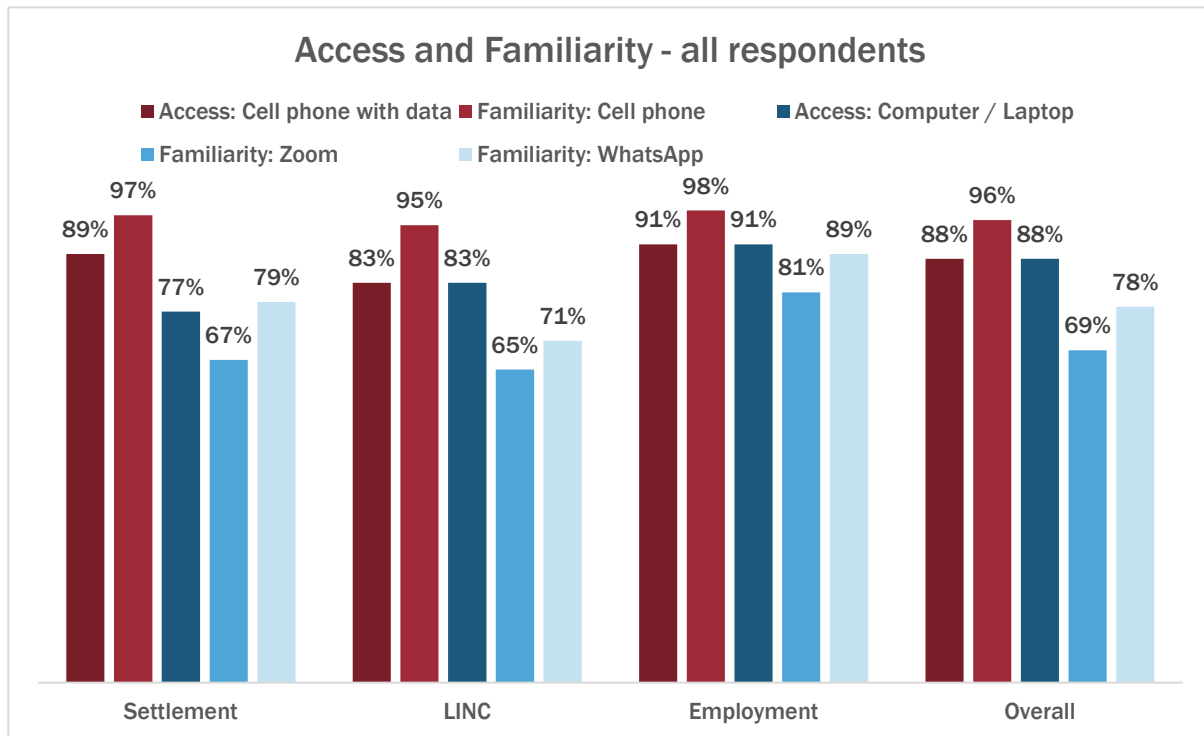
- Respondents from each business unit were asked to indicate their preferred service delivery mode (in-person and/or remote). Results were analyzed to produce three mutually exclusive categories: in-person, no preference, and remote
- Overall, approximately 1 in 4 respondents prefers in-person services to the exclusion of hybrid or remote access
 - Highest in Employment (28%), lowest in Settlement (25%)
- Almost half of respondents overall do not have a clear preference
 - Highest in employment (50%), lowest in LINC (35%)



- Demand for in-person services is highest among individuals with lower levels of access to computers / tablets, as well as less familiarity with technology
- A follow-up survey in LINC asked students about return to in-person services (n – 423). Twenty-three percent of all respondents indicated they do not want to return to in-person services even after COVID-19.

Technology: Access and familiarity

- Overall, we see high levels of both access and familiarity across all tools (cell phone, computer / laptop) and platforms (Zoom and WhatsApp)
 - 88% of clients have access to a cell phone with data
 - 88% of clients have access to a computer / laptop
- Variability exists in access and familiarity between different client groups
 - Employment clients had the highest levels of access and familiarity across all categories shown in the chart (see next page)
 - Settlement clients had higher levels of access to cell phones than to laptops, while the opposite was true for LINC clients
- Variations between client groups may be influenced by the category of entrance of respondents with economic migrants in Employment (39%) having greater access and familiarity with technology than do family class migrants in LINC (40%) and humanitarian / refugee groups in Settlement (43%)
- Clients indicating a preference for in-person services had lower levels of access and familiarity across almost all tools and platforms, a pattern more prevalent among Settlement and LINC clients.



Key learnings



Digital Connectivity

High levels of access to internet, computers and tablets

Key Tools

Cell phone, WhatsApp and Zoom were the most familiar tools / software



Service Delivery Format

Almost half of clients have no clear preference on in-person or remote services. Highest among individuals with lower levels of access to computers / tablets, as well as less familiarity with technology



ASSESSMENT 3: Youth and Young Adults

About the needs and asset assessment

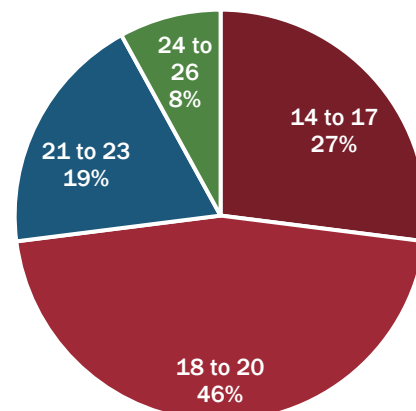
ISSofBC undertook a needs and asset assessment of Youth and Young Adults ages 14 – 26 from July 13 – 31, 2020. Twenty-one questions focused on understanding: demographics; digital literacy and access to technology; information needs; and desired service delivery format and timing.

Clients received a link to the English language survey and were asked to complete it. Follow-up recruitment was done by email and Facebook. The survey was available in English only using Hosted in Canada survey platform.

In total we received 30 responses.

Demographics

- Almost half (46%) were age 18 – 20
- 63% Female, 37% male
- 15 languages spoken at home; top 3: Arabic, English and Vietnamese
- 62% arrived in 2018-2019, some had arrived as early as 2019
- Top 3 cities of residence: Surrey, Vancouver and Burnaby



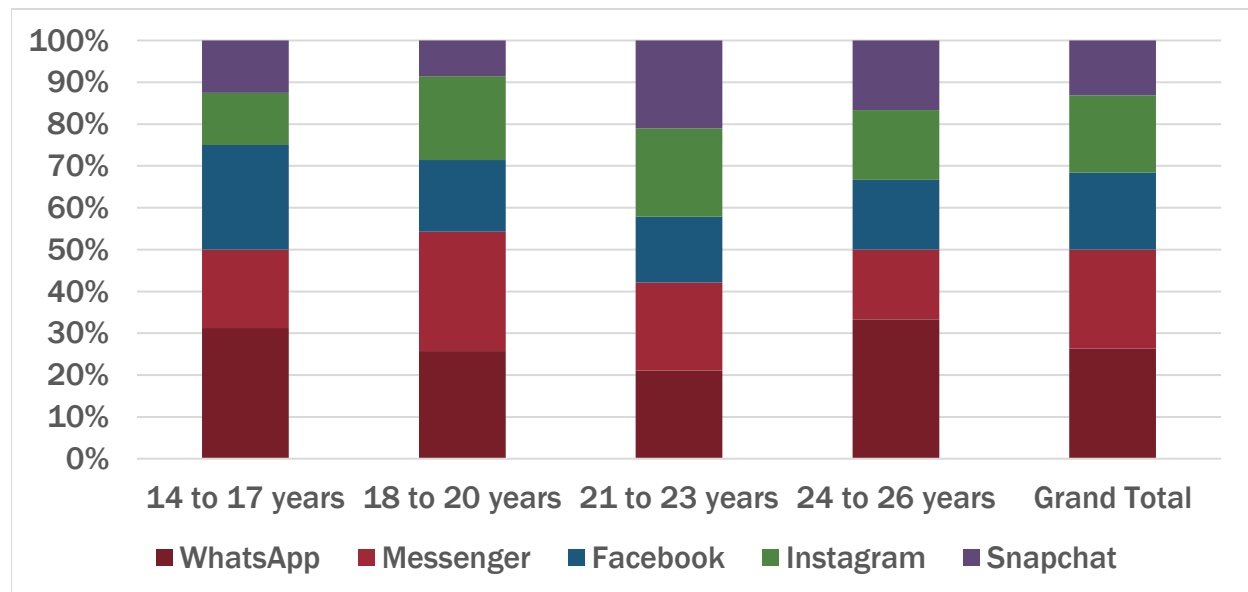
FINDINGS

Access to technology

- 97% have access to a computer or tablet always (50%) or sometimes (47%)
- All respondents have access to the internet always (78%) or sometimes (22%)
- 97% of respondents have access to social media always (83%) or sometimes (14%)
- Two thirds of respondents have access to a cell phone always (44%) or sometimes (22%)

Staying connected with family and friends

Respondents were asked to identify all of the social media platforms they use to stay connected to family and friends. The top five account for 85% of responses; most respondents using more than one type of communication.



Preferred service delivery format and timing

- Highest demand was for remote service delivery followed by a hybrid approach of in-person and remote services. Overall interest in in-person services was low.
- Type of services was differentiated by format:
 - In-person – Field trips, leadership training, and workshops about sensitive services (eg mental health, bullying and harassment)
 - Remote – Information sessions and general workshops

Key learnings



Digital Connectivity

High levels of access to internet, computers and tablets

Key Tools

WhatsApp, Messenger and Facebook are key tools



Service Demand

Highest – remote services, followed by hybrid approach
Type of service differentiated by service format



ASSESSMENT 4: Seniors and Older Adults

About the needs and asset assessment

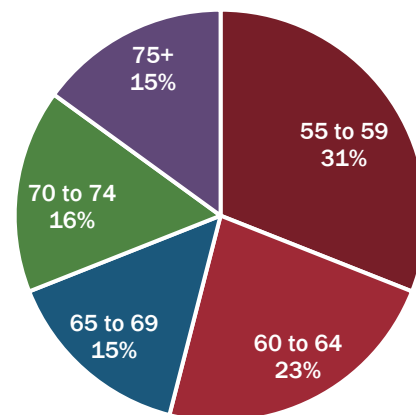
Seniors and older adults (age 55+) have been identified as a group who may face higher levels of vulnerability when accessing remote services. ISSofBC undertook a needs and asset assessment from Sept 14 to Oct 2, 2020. Questions focused on: digital literacy and access to technology; information needs; and desired service delivery format and timing.

Clients were contacted by phone in first language; responses were entered into an online survey via Hosted in Canada survey platform.

In total we received 226 responses.

Demographics

- 54% are aged 55 to 64
- The majority are permanent residents (68%) and naturalized Canadian citizens (29%)
- Top 5 languages: Farsi, Arabic, Mandarin, Russian, and Dari
- 62% arrived in 2018-2019, some had arrived as early as 2019
- Top cities of residence: Tri-Cities, Burnaby, and Vancouver.



FINDINGS

Digital Access and Familiarity

Among seniors and older adults the story is one of high levels of access to technology offset by low levels of familiarity.

| | Access | Familiarity |
|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | Always / Sometimes | (Very) Familiar |
| Computer or Tablet | 73% | 26% |
| Internet | 90% | 10% |
| Social Media | 84% | 16% |
| Cell phone with data | 75% | 25% |

55% have someone in their household who can help them with technology

Further analysis of digital access and familiarity reveals differing patterns:

- **Computer or tablet - Access (Yes), Familiarity (No)**
 - 50% do not have someone in their households to help them
 - The majority are ages 55 – 69 years
- **Cell phone - Access (Yes), Familiarity (No)**
 - 42% do not have someone in their households to help them
 - The majority are ages 55 – 69 years
- **Computer / tablet and cell phone - Access (No), Familiarity (No)**
 - The majority are ages 60 - 75 years

Staying connected with family and friends

Respondents were asked to identify all of the social media platforms they use to stay connected to family and friends. Most respondents using more than one type of communication. The top 5 types are WhatsApp (60%), Viber (35%), Facebook Messenger (23%), Phone (23%), and Telegram (15%).

Preferred service delivery format and timing

Service delivery format preferences varied across different communities and age groups.

- Remote services – highest demand across all age categories except individuals ages 75+ years
- In-person – lowest for those ages 65-75 years. Demand for in-person services was almost evenly divided between those who want them as soon as they are available (44%) and those who do not want to access them until the pandemic is over and social distancing measures are removed
- Phone – highest demand among respondents ages 75+ years

Respondents ages 55 – 59 years were the most likely to have no preference.

Digital literacy courses

Respondents were asked about their interest in participating in digital literacy courses, indicating the preferred service delivery format, as well as if they are able to bring their own technology for in-person courses. Over three-quarters of respondents expressed interest in participating in digital literacy training; 24% are unsure or not interested.

- Remote – 28%
- In-person – 26%, of whom 75% can bring their own technology
- No preference – 22%, of whom 45% can bring their own technology

Key learnings: Seniors and Older Adults



Digital Connectivity

High degree of access is offset by low degree of familiarity

Key Tools

WhatsApp, Viber, and Messenger are key tools for keeping in touch with friends and family



Service Demand

Service format is differentiated by age, with remote services in highest demand with all groups except those age 75+

INSIGHTS

Consideration of overall results provide five key insights into digital literacy and access to technology:



Key Tool: Cell Phone

Key Software: Zoom

Cell phone access was consistently high across all groups, with the exception of youth and young adults



Lower Access to Computer / Laptops Among GARS and Some Seniors

Although access to technology is high overall, technology is frequently shared between multiple family members. Further, some groups – eg GARS and some seniors – may have low or no access or familiarity with technology



Seniors: High Levels of Access Offset by Low Levels of Familiarity

Teaching digital literacy online may be reduced where clients have someone in their household who can help them. Approximately 50% of all clients have support at home



GARs – Difficulty in Supporting Children Even When Technology is Present

Access to technology is not enough given lack of digital literacy among some parents



Social Media: WhatsApp and Messenger

WhatsApp and Messenger are by far the most popular social media to connect with family and friends.

**INCREASING
DIGITAL LITERACY
FOR CLIENTS *and*
STAFF IS CRITICAL
FOR ONGOING
HYBRID SERVICE
DELIVERY**



EMERGING INSIGHTS & ONGOING CHALLENGES



Hybrid service delivery is here to stay.

- What services are best delivered in-person?
- Through remote service delivery?
- What possibilities does remote services offer?



Access issues heighten inequality

- How do we increase client access to technology and digital literacy skills for vulnerable clients?



Cell phones are the most common tool.

- How do we increase confidence and skills of clients to access services and meet identified needs using only cell phones?



Maintaining confidentiality on different platforms

- WhatsApp is popular ... but what about confidentiality and boundaries?



Mental health supports are critical in a digital environment

- How do we best support clients with mental health issues, particularly during periods of enforced isolation given the lack of ability to see body language, read cues, etc.