UNTAPPED TALENT

IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION & INCLUSION IN ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

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# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive Summary</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preface</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the Study</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Participants</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group Participants</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Access in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Experiences in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Networks in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Law Enforcement in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Care in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of COVID-19 in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences of Exclusion in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing a Sense of Home in Anchorage, Alaska</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Untapped Talent is a study of immigrants’ integration and inclusion in Anchorage with respect to education, employment, health care, access to public spaces, interactions with government agencies, social networks, and developing a sense of home. In this report, the term ‘immigrant’ is used for all people who moved from another country to the United States after their birth to live here indefinitely, including refugees, asylees, and asylum-seekers. The research team applied both quantitative and qualitative methods to uncover the results. In this document, we share findings and summarize what may help immigrants feel more at home in Anchorage.

**Education**

Education is key to supporting immigrants to live their lives in the ways they envision.

**Language** is a critical part of education. English literacy affects opportunities for education and employment, community resource access, and cross-cultural relationships. While younger immigrants have the chance to learn English in school, older immigrants face hurdles of needing to find the time, money, and programs to learn English. Funding more opportunities for immigrants to access English language training is critical. Programming should be low-cost and offered in flexible ways that meet the other demands immigrants have on their schedules.

Most participants expressed satisfaction with the PreK-12 public education system in Anchorage. However, more streamlined navigational support, language interpretation, and diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts for immigrant students and their families is needed. After budget cuts and changes in the state economy, immigrants noted that support for international students has decreased in the community’s public university, University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). UAA and other higher education institutions should increase support for international students, including both pre- and post-arrival. This should involve both practical support (such as navigating housing, transportation, and financial aid) as well as cultural and social support.

**Work**

Immigrants play a foundational role in Alaska’s workforce and work is essential for immigrants to support themselves and their families.
Many immigrants come to the U.S. with previous degrees and training, but encounter challenges transferring their credentials from their home country to the U.S. This limits their ability to contribute to their new communities and support themselves. To remedy this, bridge programs could help immigrants to become accustomed to regulations in the U.S and increase their ability to apply previous valuable training and skills from their home countries. Upon completion of a bridge program, those immigrants may sit through a nationally recognized test of what they have learned in both the bridge program and their professional training they received in a different country.

Immigrants also need more support securing jobs that reflect their professional training and skills. Job centers could increase navigation by working with local communities, trusted organizations that serve immigrants (e.g., Refugee Assistance and Immigration Services, Alaska Literacy Program), and immigrant community leaders to help match immigrants with jobs.

Immigrants also pointed out that their career advancement is affected by a glass ceiling. Too often career progression is stifled by the limited time for further training that results from working multiple low-wage jobs to make ends meet when credentials are not recognized. Considering non-traditional ways of career training, English literacy, and education, such as Apprenticeships and Integrated Education and Training models may support advancement. Moreover, companies must be attuned to unconscious biases that may shape who they promote and address them accordingly.

**Community Access**

Many immigrants in this study expressed that they feel welcomed in most public spaces, including libraries, parks, churches, and community centers. However, there are barriers to accessing these spaces. Taking public transportation is the only way some immigrants can get around the town. The public transit system may be improved through additional routes, a multilingual service map, and/or reduced fares.

**Law Enforcement and Government Agencies**

Most immigrants reported neutral to positive experiences with government services, including with law enforcement. However, some immigrants reported unjust treatment, particularly from the police, which they attributed to the language they speak and the way they appear. Community outreach and intercultural trainings may help build trust and increase effectiveness in working with immigrants from diverse cultural backgrounds.
Healthcare System

Immigrants expressed that health care is difficult to access due to many barriers, including cost, lack of insurance, transportation, and English literacy. These barriers can be addressed through building stronger collaborations between healthcare systems and communities. More patient-centered, culturally appropriate care is needed. Healthcare systems can partner with and employ immigrant community leaders to provide outreach and navigation support. Providing services outside of the hospital and/or clinic may also help increase access to care. Additionally, interpretation and translation services are critical.

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted immigrants and highlighted long-time disparities in the community. It has been difficult for immigrant communities to access accurate multilingual information regarding COVID-19, as well as testing, vaccinations, and treatment. COVID-19 has also impacted education and disrupted social connections. Online learning was especially hard for immigrant children and their families.

COVID-19 further illustrated the connection between housing, work, education, language, transportation, and good health. Many immigrants live in multigenerational multi-dwelling units, making social distancing and public health recommendations challenging to implement. Many also work jobs that are not possible to do remotely, lack reliable transportation, and lack access to health care. The pandemic worsened many existing problems.

Anchorage as Home

In spite of these difficulties, many immigrants consider Anchorage their home, are raising their families here, and are working to improve Anchorage. We can address our challenges and build on our strengths to make Anchorage a better place to live.
The reception immigrants face in their new community shapes immigrants’ quality of life and the community’s positive progress. Recognizing this, communities around the world have been seeking to create more positive contexts of reception for their newest community members: adopting policies, structures, and practices intended to promote immigrant community integration and inclusion.

In 2014, the Municipality of Anchorage set its intention to become a welcoming community, one that promotes immigrant integration into the economic and social fabric of the community via its partnerships, policies, and practices. Welcoming Anchorage began with diverse stakeholders across the municipality, including the school district, organizations, and businesses. Together, they helped to develop the municipality’s first strategic inclusion plan, which included five core pillars: equitable access; civic engagement; connected, safe, and healthy communities; education; and, economic development and entrepreneurship.

To support these pillars, in 2019, Anchorage was selected to join a cohort of 24 cities as part of World Education Services Inc.’s Skilled Immigrant Integration Program. With their support, Welcoming Anchorage and SouthCentral Alaska’s Area Health Education Center partnered with University of Alaska Anchorage professors to conduct a study to identify facilitators and barriers to integration and inclusion in the municipality. The primary project team included Nyabony Gat, BS; Shannon Kuhn, MPH; Sara Buckingham, PhD; Amana Mbise, PhD; Tzu-Chiao Chen, PhD; and, Sofia Sytniak, BS.

Many partners were involved in the development and implementation of this project. We would like to thank the following partners for their support:

- The Alaska Primary Care Association for in-kind staff time dedicated to the project.
- The University of Alaska Anchorage’s College of Arts and Science, College of Health, and Community and Technical College for in-kind faculty time dedicated to the project.
- The University of Alaska Anchorage’s Center for Community Engagement & Learning for a grant to fund participant incentives.
● The Municipality of Anchorage for in-kind staff time dedicated to the project and funding for translation and interpretation services.

● The World Education Services Inc.’s Skilled Immigrant Integration Program and its partner cities for technical assistance.

● The Alaska Literacy Program, Catholic Social Services’ Refugee Assistance and Immigration Services, and the Anchorage School District for providing feedback on study questions and spreading the word about the project.

● The Alaska Institute for Justice Language Interpreter Center for providing interpretation and translation services for the project.

● Community language liaisons who verified the accuracy of survey translation by back-translating the materials.

● The countless people who helped to develop this project and who took time to share their experiences as immigrants to this community.

If you have any questions about this report, please contact Nyabony Gat at ngat@alaska.edu.
ABOUT THE STUDY

In this report, we endeavor to answer the question, “What enables immigrant residents to live, thrive, and contribute in Anchorage, Alaska?” In doing so, we discover numerous community policies, programs, and practices that welcome immigrants and help them become fully included, participatory community members. We also uncover ways our community has come up short, experiences in which community members have been excluded and unable to fully engage in Anchorage.

In 2020 we made a survey in English, Spanish, and Hmong available to immigrant community members via community partners, flyers, and word-of-mouth. The survey had questions about immigrant residents’ experiences in Anchorage and their views about community resources. We used statistical techniques to analyze the data.

In 2021 we followed up on survey responses with ten focus groups in Spanish, Samoan, Hmong, Tagalog, Korean, Arabic, and English. Focus groups are organized discussions among a small group of people. We talked about immigrant residents’ experiences in Anchorage. We transcribed the interviews, coded them, and analyzed them using a consensus-based team approach.

Who participated in the survey?

169 people participated in the survey.

The survey participants ranged in age from 18 to 84, with the average participant being 40 years old.

More women (75.7%) participated in the survey than men (24.3%).

The survey participants had lived in Anchorage from less than 1 year to 43 years and had lived in the United States from less than 1 year to 59 years. On average, the survey participants had lived in Anchorage for 11 years and in the United States for 16 years.

All regions of the world and 45 countries were represented in the survey.
More of the survey participants were from **Asia** than other regions, including South Korea (32), Japan (16), Thailand (12), and the Philippines (8). Many of the survey participants from **Africa** were from Somalia (9) and Ethiopia (6). Many of the survey participants from **Latin America** were from Mexico (12). Many of the survey participants from **Europe** were from Germany (8) and Russia (6).

Survey participants lived across most regions of Anchorage.
Who participated in the focus groups?

50 people participated in the focus groups. Focus group participants were similar demographically to survey participants.

The focus group participants ranged in age from 19 to 77, with the average participant being 43 years old.

More women (78%) participated in the focus groups than men (22%).

The focus group participants had lived in Anchorage from less than 1 year to 47 years and had lived in the United States from less than 1 year to 60 years. On average, the focus group participants had lived in Anchorage for 15 years and in the United States for 23 years.

All world regions and 18 countries were represented in the focus groups.

Focus group participants’ countries included: Canada, the Dominican Republic, Egypt, Ethiopia, Germany, Hong Kong, Japan, Jordan, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Russia, Samoa, South Korea, Sudan, Thailand, and Ukraine.
FINDINGS

We have organized report findings into seven parts:

First, we begin the report by reporting on participants’ integration into Anchorage and factors that supported their integration.

Second, we discuss language, because language access was at the center of immigrants’ inclusionary and exclusionary experiences in Anchorage.

Third, we detail immigrants’ experiences in education and work, two critical settings for community integration, opportunity, and contribution.

Fourth, we describe immigrants’ experiences with other aspects of community life, including social networks, government, law enforcement, and healthcare systems, and housing.

Fifth, we note the impacts of COVID-19 on immigrants’ lives.

Sixth, we describe ways in which participants experienced exclusion and discrimination in Anchorage.

Seventh, we describe ways in which participants developed a sense of home in Anchorage.

Note: In this report, the term ‘immigrant’ is used for all people who moved from another country to the United States after their birth to live here indefinitely, including refugees, asylees, and asylum-seekers.
Integration in Anchorage, Alaska

Immigrants who participated in the survey completed the Multidimensional Measure of Immigrant Integration, which measures psychological integration, linguistic integration, economic integration, political integration, social integration, and navigational integration. We examined levels of integration and what factors contributed to integration.

![Integration Index Survey Results](image)

*Figure 4: Level of integration across domains based on survey data.*

We describe each of these domains of integration on the next page.

Integration on the Multidimensional Measure of Immigrant Integration was converted to range from 0 to 100%. You can see that the overall integration levels of survey participants were quite high, with integration across every domain being greater than 50%. Participants varied greatly in their integration, however. The thin black lines across each bar represent the average range of integration for approximately 2/3 of the participants. This shows us how diverse participants were on a given domain and is called variance. For example, while the average participant was 69% integrated according to the index (see overall), 2/3 of the participants were between 54% integrated and 83% integrated.

Overall, we see that survey participants were very linguistically integrated, meaning that they could read, speak, write, and understand the primary language of the area, in this case, English. In comparison, survey participants were less socially integrated, meaning that they had comparably fewer social ties and interactions with U.S. born people in Anchorage.
We can also see interesting differences across domains with similar average integration. For example, there was comparably greater variation in participants’ economic integration – their income in relation to the average income in Anchorage, their employment and satisfaction with it, and their ability to meet different levels of unexpected expenses. There was comparably less variation in participants’ psychological integration – their feeling of connection with Anchorage, their wish to continue living here, and their sense of belonging. In other words, while survey participants had a great range of economic situations, they had smaller differences among them in terms of the belonging they felt to the community.

We describe each of these domains of integration below as well as what factors shaped survey participants’ integration.

**Economic Integration**
Economic integration is a reflection of an immigrant’s income in relation to the average income in the community, employment, satisfaction with employment, and the ability to meet different levels of unexpected expenses. Immigrants who were older, who had lived for more years in Anchorage and in the United States, and who had a higher level of education had greater economic integration.

**Psychological Integration**
Psychological integration is a reflection of an immigrant’s feeling of connection with their new community, their wish to continue living there, and their sense of belonging. Immigrants who had lived more of their lives in Anchorage and in the United States, and who had a higher level of education had greater psychological integration.

**Navigational Integration**
Navigational integration is a reflection of an immigrant’s ability to manage basic needs in the host country, such as seeing a doctor, addressing legal problems, and searching for jobs. Levels of navigational integration were comparatively lower in this sample, meaning that immigrants who participated in the survey had more difficulties navigating the community than their integration in other aspects of community life. Immigrants who had lived more of their lives in Anchorage and who had a higher level of education had greater navigational integration. Women also tended to report greater navigational integration compared to men.
**Political Integration**
Political integration is a reflection of an immigrant’s understanding of the important political issues facing the community and the degree to which they engage in discussions and political action. Immigrants who were older, who had lived for more years in Anchorage and in the United States, and who had a higher level of education had greater political integration.

**Social Integration**
Social integration is a reflection of an immigrant’s social ties and interactions with U.S. born people in Anchorage, as well as bridging social capital through organizational involvement. Levels of social integration were comparatively lower in this sample, meaning that immigrants who participated in the survey were less socially integrated than they were in most other aspects of community life. Immigrants who were younger, who had lived for more years in Anchorage and in the United States, and who had a higher level of education had greater social integration.

**Linguistic Integration**
Linguistic integration is a reflection of an immigrant’s assessment of their ability to read, speak, write, and understand the language of the area, in this case English. Levels of language integration were comparatively high in this sample, meaning that immigrants who participated in the survey had relatively high literacy in English. Immigrants who were younger, who had lived more of their lives in Anchorage and in the United States, and who had a higher level of education had greater linguistic integration.
Language Access in Anchorage, Alaska

Language was central to discussions of immigrants’ experiences in Anchorage. Participants described the significant impact that language access and barriers had on their lives.

**The Impact of Language**

Participants consistently discussed difficulties related to language as the most challenging aspect after moving to Anchorage, Alaska. Not speaking English played a significant role in feeling isolated and alone after moving:

> “I think the language barrier was the most difficult … [we were in] this neighborhood that we weren’t familiar with. And we had no other contact with the world.”

Language also played a crucial role in adjusting to life in Anchorage, and language access impacted one’s ability to seek out resources, find critical information, and contribute to the community. We discuss the impact of language access in each of the settings we highlight in the following sections of the report.

**Learning English**

Many participants discussed their experiences learning English after moving to Anchorage, Alaska, and a few unique barriers to learning English arose:

**For children, there were many opportunities for learning English in school.** However, a couple of participants discussed how not being able to speak English as a child was interpreted as a developmental, intellectual, or academic difficulty:

> “So like, I remember being in a classroom and a teacher just lecturing about math and science and stuff, and English, you know, whatever. And I don’t understand, you know, like I said, I just hear mouth moving. And I remember those, I was struggling with math. And I wasn’t talking much because I couldn’t speak English. And now using my fingers to count. For some reason, the teacher thought I was, I don’t know if this is politically correct, that I was mentally challenged or like retarded.”

Participants also discussed that they were often removed from other classes for their English learning classes, making it easy to fall behind on work in other courses. For adults, participants mentioned how critical easy-to-access, low-cost English language programs were for English learning. Many were not aware of the resources that exist to aid adults in learning English after arriving in Anchorage. A couple of participants noted that it appears more accessible for youth to learn English after moving because they learn English in school:
“So I will say that like life is easier for the kids who came here as youth … and they get to go to school in English and then like find better jobs compared to the ones who came here as adults or like older people, they all the parents and who have to learn English and try to adapt to this country.”

While learning English, participants mentioned that they were self-conscious to use English in public settings over the fear of making mistakes. Additionally, participants discussed feeling embarrassed if they needed to ask someone to repeat or rephrase something:

“I always feel that I have to prove myself because I cannot speak English as other people do. And this can have some, I mean, I have to compensate this variance by working harder. That’s how I feel. Sometimes this mindset limits my action, or willingness to do things. The thing is, I am fully aware, but it, I think it’s going to be a constant struggle for me, because I already know I am speaking with broken English. And that really makes me don’t want to speak at all.”

These concerns were exacerbated by the fact that learning English is not only about knowing the correct words to use, but also learning specific dialects, accents, and slang to fit into their social and cultural contexts.

**Children and Family Members as Interpreters and Translators**

Unfortunately, language access was challenging across settings. Federal laws require any settings that receive federal funding (e.g., schools, universities, medical care, etc.) to provide equitable access regardless of the language people speak by having multilingual employees and/or providing interpretation and translation services. However, participants often reported that services were not always available to them in the language they speak. Participants shared needing to rely on family members, most often children who were learning English in school, to serve the role of interpreter for their parents in various settings, including in court, in healthcare settings, and in parent-teacher conferences:

“I think I remember going to court, I think it was high school. I went there with my mom as an interpreter. She had a car accident. And then the gentleman was saying it was my mom’s fault. My mom said it wasn’t. So we had to go to court.”

Participants also discussed how children are taken out of school because their parents needed them for interpretation:

“I was taken out of school. It wasn’t horrific, but it was a nuisance to get out of school just so you have to translate for your mom. I mean, I loved her, but you know, it shouldn’t be happening.”
Education in Anchorage, Alaska

The majority of participants reported that they had completed some level of education before they migrated to the United States.

Education Brings Opportunities

Many focus group participants also sought out additional educational opportunities post-migration, particularly younger immigrants. Participants spoke about their experience with the education system and the impact education has made in their lives:

“I have more opportunities. I got to go to school here. Middle school high school, like the end of 6th grade middle school, high school and now in college.”

Education was reported as being an important factor for integration and a successful life in Anchorage.

Figure 5: Survey participants’ highest level of education before they migrated to the U.S.
“You know, I mean, so that was my experience, that education and the networking or right, meeting the right people really helped me get to where I am now.”

Indeed, many survey participants also reported having sought out educational opportunities in the United States.

**Figure 6:** Survey participants’ highest level of education that they sought after they migrated to the U.S.

**Primary & Secondary Education (Pre-K to 12th Grade) Experiences**
Participants who are parents of youth in Kindergarten through 12th grade shared overall positive experiences with Anchorage’s education system. However, approximately one in ten participants reported discomfort interacting with public schools in Anchorage.
Many participants felt like their children had more educational opportunities in Alaska and the U.S. One participant said through an interpreter:

“So her two little children never been to school in Egypt, when they were in Egypt they never went to school. When they came to Alaska, to Anchorage, they attend school, they love school, they don’t want to miss any day. And she said she’s satisfied about the way, how they are progressing through school. She’s really, really happy. And the kids even when they’re not feeling well, they want to go to school. She has no issue, she likes it. She said it’s excellent.”

Many participants reported being very satisfied with their and their children’s experiences in public schools, often referencing the quality and dedication of teachers:

“I think the teachers are great. I think that my kids are very lucky that we have some good teachers. … And I think they are dedicated, they really care about the students. And so far, I have really good experience with my kids’ schools and the teachers.”

Some participants reported seeing improvements in the Anchorage School District (ASD) over time. A number of participants indicated that they felt the quality of education had improved:

“My kids received a great education. For example, my daughter is in college. And my daughter say, ‘Mom, I can say to my teacher in high school, thank you. Because all the information they gave me, [I] use now.’ … The teachers, they [gave her] good tools to prepare to college.”

A few participants remarked that the school district had also become more welcoming, culturally inclusive, and responsive to the needs of immigrant students and their families over time:
“... it's one of the most diverse districts in the nation and so to my knowledge it is pretty good and pretty inclusive. I actually used to volunteer at a regular middle school with refugee children.”

However, some participants pointed out that inclusivity depended on the specific school and its staff:

“I love our school district. I think the schools, as others have said that diversity is amazing, the schools are accommodating. But I see that a lot more can be done on a district level. Because when I see things, they are more school specific. So if you have a principal who’s involved, that principal is going to look out for the kids or the teachers who are involved, they will do that. But district-wise, I don't see a plan in place. And about being inclusive too.”

Some participants, such as this one, went on to say how they – as parents – had to take the initiative to ensure that their children’s school experiences were inclusive:

“I always make sure that my kids know their holiday is just as important as anybody else’s. And nowadays, we have gotten somewhat multicultural. So we are celebrating Christmas, Thanksgiving, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, but then I see that that’s where it stops. I don’t see any mention of Ramadan, I don’t see mention of Eid. And we have a huge Muslim population here. So I think we have to be more inclusive. ... I have so many nephews and nieces who are in Anchorage school district, and I am the only one who goes in teachers in my kids’ classes. We are the only ones who hold a session where my kids can share what they celebrate. And that way they feel like okay, you know, 'I'm part of the group too.' And the group also feels like they're part of them. Because when they keep saying I don't celebrate this, they don't belong in their heart. And the kids also see that they don't belong, because now they are different.

One more thing is dietary restrictions. So we know that the Jewish faith and Muslim faith, they don't eat pork. And the teachers are really good. They'll ask you, 'Okay, does your child have any allergies, any dietary things and stuff?' That's good. The cafeteria lady is going to be good. But then I have noticed personally like, things kind of fall through the cracks because we are not aware. I noticed when I have lunch with my kids ... that one girl wasn’t eating pizza. It was turkey pepperoni. It said turkey pepperoni on it. But you know, everybody's like, 'Oh, that's pepperoni pizza.' So I approached her and I said, 'You do realize that's not pork? That's turkey pepperoni.' She ate the pizza. ... She loved pizza. And nobody caught it that ... it may be that diet. ... Everybody knew she doesn't eat pork. They never just went that extra step. And it wasn't out of spite. I mean, if they had realized what they had known, they would have done so. But I think maybe on district wise, we can have vocabulary and terminology that's open and more inclusive. So everybody's aware of it.”
Finally, many participants also noted that the school district had developed many programs to address the unique needs and preferences of students in a public school setting:

“Every year, they have like at least 10, 15 new programs, and they reach out to the families a lot. So they’re doing pretty good. I have seen a lot of positive changes from when I first had my kids enrolled in school. So yeah, they’re doing good.”

Still, some participants noted that there were sometimes not enough resources to allow equitable access to these programs:

“I think that the Anchorage School District as a whole is very good. It is a very diverse population. It has a lot of different programs that should match well with children. Unfortunately, those programs such as the [language] immersion programs require parents to transport. So that’s hard. So that means that the children that are in those classes tend to be upper middle class to wealthy … But as a whole, as a parent who had kids who went through the system, I thought they did a decent job compared to other public school systems.”

Language in Schools

Many participants reported language barriers as creating difficulties in parent-child relationships. Numerous parents brought up how not being able to speak English created challenges related to their children’s schooling, such as not being able to help their children with their homework. In addition, parent-teacher conferences could be challenging to navigate, often requiring a child in the family to interpret for their parents. Participants expressed a need for the school district to provide more extensive and better resources for parents when navigating their children’s schooling:

“For example, parent-teacher conferences, if somebody doesn’t speak English … then I think that the teacher, the school district, has an obligation to make it easier to be able to share with that parent, what’s going on.”

Navigation, Outreach, and Communication to Parents

Many participants expressed appreciation for the many different programs offered within the Anchorage School District. However, this also was often overwhelming for immigrant families to navigate:

“For newcomers. It’s really hard to grasp like what program and all the lotteries going around for school. You know, if you want to enroll in different programs, it was just hard to understand how it works at first.”
Participants noted that the Anchorage School District offers support and assistance to parents, but with so much information, it is hard to sometimes know where to start:

“I have two kids in ASD, and I am surprised at how many services are offered to us … It is a lot of information. And so maybe it's easier for me because I speak English fairly well. But if for other parents, perhaps if there's a language barrier, I don't know if they do - they offer interpretation or translation for those parents. Because there is a lot of information … I mean, there's just program after program after program like I don’t even have enough time in the day to enroll them and all of that. So I think that we are given a lot, and we're very grateful for it. I appreciate it.”

Some participants also reflected that in some immigrant communities, more is needed to encourage and incentivize family participation:

“... A lot of them, they don’t show up and that is … not very encouraging, to the school or the family or, you know, to the teacher that, oh, you know, this family didn’t show up. And we, you know, we did offer to have a workshop, we did offer to support but, you know, it is, it is a big part of, you know, that a family should be there to keep it going and to let us know, that, you know, to put in their input and everything. And yes, it is important for them to, to put in their voice.”

In spite of these challenges, a number of participants remarked on positive changes they had seen in the school district’s work with immigrant families in recent years:

“I think ASD has improved so much, especially communication between the parents and teachers. And now, ASD has almost all language interpreters, or you know, even the letters and everything online. You could read those things in [your] own languages. When I went to school, we did not have that. So whenever there was a parent teacher conference, or even like letters, I had to interpret it, everything to my parents and all that. So [it has] gotten a lot better.”

University (Higher Education) Experiences
Some participants moved to Anchorage because they went to the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA) as an international student. Many spoke about the strong support they received many years ago on campus:

“They used to offer help with like, picking up from the airport, when they just arrived, they helped to find housing. Many students, they didn't have driver licenses, or cars and foreign students, and they just gave them rides and help them with accommodation. And there was actually advisors who helped them with paperwork and all this, like visa support. It was all there. And they had agreements with their
foreign universities like so you could get diploma from university or overseas and [your] like dual diploma."

However, today participants reported that there is much less support for international students, leading to the loss of talent from abroad:

“And the University of Alaska system impressed me … First, I was really impressed. And like I said, everything was great, but gradually with the years, maybe due to budget cuts, and all this changes with the state economy. I just saw it going down the hill, and just those cultural centers and all the support system that was there for foreign students…These days, it’s just far from what it used to be. So the support is not there.”

Working for the School District

Participants who came to the U.S. with experience and/or educational training as teachers reported barriers to being able to work as teachers in the U.S. For some, challenges were around navigating the job application system:

“So, for me, I was a teacher in my country. I taught for five years. So when I came to Alaska, I wanted to be a teacher, but I didn’t know how to apply …”

For others, they did not have the needed credentials to teach in the U.S.:

“I was a school teacher in the Philippines. And when I arrived in Alaska, I was hoping I could get a teaching job right away…Then I learned that I had to get certification as a school teacher. Well, I did not want to have to go back to school … And so I ended up being a clerk typist."

“I didn’t have a hard time finding a job because it was just, it was just a job at the catering. But I did not get the job that I really wanted to. The job that I really wanted, which is to be, to be working with the school district. It took me like four years before I was hired in the school district as an ELL tutor. So yeah, and until now I’m still working for the school district as an ELL tutor.”
Work in Anchorage, Alaska

In the surveys, most participants reported being employed at the time of the study. Participants who were not employed were typically pursuing education or being a homemaker.

**CURRENT WORK STATUS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment Status</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In paid work</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In school</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed and actively looking for a job</td>
<td>5.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed and not actively looking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanently sick or disabled</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In military service</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doing unpaid housework</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 8: Survey participants’ current employment status.*

**Jobs vs. Career Pathways**

Immigrants play many critical roles in Alaska’s workforce, and employment influences how they are able to engage in the community. The majority of participants reported that finding work was easy in Anchorage, with many jobs available to new arrivals:

“Finding a job is not very hard … if we work hard, always there [is] work.”

However, the majority of jobs readily available to immigrant community members were low-paid, low-level, and/or temporary. Many people looked for employment immediately after moving to Anchorage as a key step in becoming part of the community:

“When I just came my English wasn’t great at all. I spoke broken English … but I still didn’t have any problems finding a job. Of course, it was like restaurant jobs or like automotive industry jobs, but it was no problem.”
Common workplaces referenced by participants were in the **service and hospitality industry** (e.g., hotels, restaurants/fast food, warehouses, dry cleaners), janitorial, and driving jobs. Several participants expressed a **desire for more support navigating career options**:

“I wish I had someone who would have told me … here are your options … instead of just finding a job, because I did find a job right away … I ended up working at, well first job was McDonald's, and then I worked at the post office where a lot of Filipinos worked.”

While participants reported readily finding work, **about half of the survey participants reported that they do not work in their field of training and education**.

In the surveys, participants named many **barriers** that prevented them from securing work in their field of training and education.

**Figure 9:** Survey participants’ current employment in field of training and/or education.

**Figure 10:** Number of people reporting diverse barriers to working in their field of training and/or education in the surveys.
In the focus groups, participants also named many **barriers** that prevented them from securing higher-paid work and career advancement, including:

a) Being required to speak English fluently for a position;
b) Challenges with transferring credentials to Anchorage;
c) Difficulty acquiring the particular educational training needed for the work;
d) A need for transportation to access work;
e) A need for childcare to participate in work; and,
f) A need for a social network and connections to secure work.

**The Impact of English Language Literacy on Work**

The top referenced barrier to finding higher-level work was **English literacy**:

“The biggest issue the challenge for us was the language barrier. Because not speaking the language is, it’s really hard to do anything with it, especially if you need help.”

Many participants moved to Anchorage knowing little or no English. Participants commonly reported not having the time to learn English or go back to school due to working multiple jobs and family obligations. Depending on the type of work, some participants improved their English skills on the job, while others had little opportunity to practice speaking English due to being isolated in their positions without social interaction.

For some participants with higher levels of English proficiency, their **bilingual language skills** helped them find work:

“Employers told me that ‘Oh, you’re great to hire because, you know, you speak English and Russian and Ukrainian.’”

**The Impact of Education and Credentialing on Work**

Generally, people were able to find work, but in order to find jobs that gave them financial stability or career fulfillment, they needed additional education and training, which took time and money:

“But if I educate myself or get an education … it’s not going to guarantee me at the job that I want, but it’s going to open more doors for opportunities for interviews, and it’s my job to land it. So that’s what I did.”

Participants with higher education were more successful at finding higher-paid jobs and many expressed job satisfaction:

“Again, I felt pretty blessed … I was able to graduate, get a degree and get a job. Good job and working for federal government right now.”
However, for people who came to the U.S. in adulthood and did not have educational opportunities readily available to them in the U.S., moving beyond low-wage jobs was a challenge that was often insurmountable:

“My father, he never learned English. And he stuck around working minimum wage, below minimum wage jobs usually under the table … Just to support his family, you know. And I think the biggest obstacle, the biggest thing I would tell people is if you want to get out of poverty, you know, get an education …”

More than one-quarter of survey participants reported having difficulty affording their monthly expenses at times.

**ABILITY TO PAY MONTHLY EXPENSES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>10.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 11: Survey participants’ self-reported ability to pay monthly expenses.*

Frequently, **not having a U.S. high school diploma or General Equivalency Diploma (GED) was a main educational barrier to a career pathway.**

Participants shared difficulties with **not having credentials transfer** from their home country to the U.S. and a lack of mechanisms in Alaska universities for transferring credentials. Immigrants trained as skilled professionals in their home countries ended up working in low-level jobs, a situation that is often referred to as ‘brain waste’: 
“A lot of times, especially with refugees, a lot of times when they come here, they are very highly skilled and they have education and they have a skill set, but it just doesn’t transfer over …”

“People are working in the service industry, but they could have easily been one of our hospital staff.”

The Impact of Immigration Status on Work
Not having a green card (permanent residence) or U.S. citizenship also limited job opportunities. Language presented a barrier to passing the citizenship test as well as earning a high school diploma or GED.

The Impact of Family and Lack of Affordable Childcare on Work
Family was commonly shared as being an important part of life and an influential factor in seeking work opportunities. Many of the participants described their homes as multigenerational, with children, parents, and grandparents living together:

“... these are such usually family-centered, family-focused cultures that we see is that when it comes to employment, a lot of employers are not family-oriented or family-friendly …”

Childcare was reported to be prohibitively expensive for some participants and a limiting factor in them being able to be part of the workforce:

“... And I'm probably going to end up having to pay more for my kids' babysitting. So now I'm stuck.”

While a higher-paid job could potentially mean more money to pay for childcare, some participants shared anecdotes of how lack of affordable childcare can drive people to accept lower-paid jobs instead:

“So some people like try to work part-time job or low wage job so they can get like assistance from the state so they can help them pay for ... childcare ... and they didn't have to like pay high on their rent in other places like to be able to stay in low-income job and spend time with their kids.”

The Impact of Age on Work
All of the barriers to work were exacerbated for the older population of immigrants who moved to Anchorage later in life:

“And I remember having to share, we all shared one room ... I remember my father would walk miles and miles to [a restaurant] as a dishwasher, working under the table making below minimum wage ...”
Language was a top barrier to finding work for older adults who moved to the U.S. without speaking English. As previously mentioned, immigrants who moved to Anchorage as children learned English in schools and were surrounded by other kids speaking the language. Many immigrants who immigrated as kids witnessed their parents’ struggles:

“Most of the time you know, those of us who are on the younger side when we come here we fare better as opposed to the population who is on the older side, the grown-ups. But for the grown-ups, it's much harder.”

The older generation also often was not offered the resources and support needed for work opportunities in the same way younger immigrants were. Moreover, they had to juggle many roles and expectations to make ends meet which often precluded seeking out additional training or opportunities:

“So, on one hand, their children are moving ahead in school and doing well. And here they are. They're finding it difficult to help their children with homework. They’re struggling to get a job, life is very difficult and they’re sort of left, there’s no one there that’s trying to help them, pick them up to be able to have them get a job or to learn skills, so they can get a better job. And, and who’s there to help them.”

An Example of a Career Pathway: U.S. Military Service

One way in which a number of immigrant participants could not only secure a job, but one that led to advanced career pathways, was through military service:

“When I joined the military, I was able to take care of me, myself, and my people.”

A primary benefit of military service was the educational opportunities it provided service members that supported career advancement:

“I am actually pretty lucky. And I came up here because my husband was in the military. And so I was able to find a job pretty much immediately just working part-time and going to school part-time at the same time. And, and I got my school paid for by my work and also by the military. So I got my four-year degree in accounting, and then I proceeded to get my master's degree in business administration.”

Career Opportunities are Key to Well-being

Ultimately, one’s career played an important role in their quality of life and well-being. Participants remarked on how low-paying jobs required them to work many hours and left little time to seek other opportunities. Careers offered immigrants the opportunity to contribute to their new communities and provided life satisfaction. There is a well-documented connection between the quality of one’s work and one’s well-being. Therefore, opportunities to engage in meaningful careers that provide a living wage and leave time for other parts of one’s life are critical:
“... In Mexico, I have my job ... I work in the morning and study in the night. I have busy days all the time ... But today it’s not my, this is not the life I wanted ... But okay, is, I need to take my time to start to back on my old life ... sometimes I feel so sad ... But when I start working, I feel, I feel better and I start go to the school and start again back to my life again when you have before.”

In sum, while jobs were seen as plentiful, the opportunities to build one’s career and receive a living wage that could support a family were much less abundant.
Community Experiences in Anchorage, Alaska

Participants reported regularly accessing a variety of community places across Anchorage. The places that participants indicated most regularly frequenting included parks, libraries, places of education, recreation centers/fitness opportunities, and places of worship. Participants also indicated accessing a variety of other community places that they were not directly inquired about, such as dining and entertainment venues.

![Community Places Frequented Chart]

**Figure 12:** The percentage of survey participants who reported visiting a variety of community places in Anchorage.

Over half of the survey participants who went to parks did so at least once per week. Approximately 25% of the survey participants were not able to access public parks as much as they wanted.

Approximately 75% of the survey participants who used the library went once per month or less. Approximately 20% of the survey participants were not able to access the library as much as they wanted.

Approximately 2/3 of the survey participants who went to recreation centers, fitness clubs, and/or participated in sports leagues did so at least once per week. Approximately 27% of the survey participants were not able to access as many fitness resources as they wanted.

More than 80% of the survey participants who frequented places of worship went at least once per week. Approximately 15% of the survey participants were not able to access places of worship as much as they wanted.
A lack of time due to work schedule and/or family responsibilities emerged as a primary barrier to accessing these community spaces.

Figure 13: The percentage of survey participants who reported the above barriers to accessing community places.
Social Networks in Anchorage, Alaska

Social networks refer to an immigrants’ personal contacts or relationships with other people. They can be from one’s own country of origin:

“... And there are some people who are from the Sudanese community, they help us too.”

They can also be from a different country of origin, such as the United States:

“And I have a lot of friends who are American and born in the United States ... I've known them since I moved to the United States, and we're still friends.”

Primary social networks in Anchorage described by participants included friends, colleagues, and neighbors. Social networks played a role in immigrant integration and inclusion processes including cultural change and feelings of Alaska as home. Social networks helped people bolster their language skills, navigate educational structures, and find work. Social networks with people from the same country of origin were commonly found through connections to participants’ families and were often important connections for participants to maintain their cultures. They were also frequently reported to be helpful in participants navigating work, resources, and higher education – even more so than social networks outside of immigrants’ country of origin.

Social Connections Facilitate Work
Making social connections was important for finding opportunities, such as work:

“You know, I mean, so that was my experience, that education and the networking or right, meeting the right people really helped me get to where I am now.”

Participants frequently learned about job opportunities through their social networks:

“So for Denali [pseudonym], she found jobs through friends of her family and for Prince [pseudonym] he also initially moved to Kodiak before Anchorage, but he had found those job opportunities at a cannery in Kodiak because of his friends in the Philippines. And so it's from knowing Filipinos already, who knew of those job opportunities when they got here and then not being choosy about the work too.”

Schools are Places to Meet People in Different Social Networks
Social networks with people from different countries of origin were commonly associated by participants with the concept of a welcoming community. The most frequently referenced setting for building social networks with people different from themselves was school. Schools and other educational settings were places where connections across cultures were made:
“When I was going to school, I got to volunteer. I was in programs in like connection also helped me like to get a better job comparing to other people. Even if you speak English, you also have to have like connection in order to get a job that will actually help you that wouldn’t. So you wouldn’t need to work like two jobs or three jobs to rent a place or being able to afford food or anything like that.”

Many Anchorage schools are diverse, with people from many different backgrounds:

“So then you see same kind of people congregating there, but in school, everybody has you are more mixed. So I think schools are such a good place to get this diversity, and belonging.”

Many youth made important connections through attending public schools.

**Fewer Settings Facilitated Social Networks for Older Immigrants**

Overall, however, there were fewer structured opportunities for older immigrants to make connections compared to their children:

“My parents can’t get what I’m like getting like oh, like the house or the resource that resources that I got connected to – friends and like, the way I can like, understand in the culture difference is harder for them to get adopted to different cultures unlike the youth.”

**Religious Communities Support Integration**

One setting through which participants of different ages developed social networks was through religious communities and places of worship:

“My parents came here … when they try to adapt to this new, new place and find a job that’s very difficult, again, due to their English, but what helped them to accommodate to this new environment is our religious community. Because due to people who attend same churches we do, we were able to support each other.”

Sometimes churches and religious communities provide navigational and cultural functions as well:

“I can tell you one thing I was really surprised with was the number of Korean churches in town, because I didn’t expect to see these many Koreans everywhere … we went to Korean Catholic Church at first, and that environment was kind of different from what, what I experienced since my childhood back in Korea. Even if it’s the same Catholic Church, it was more like a community not for not aiming for the religious activity, it was more like an activity, more gearing towards the activity or the daily life of things and events.”
Culture and Identity Networks are Critical to Quality of Life

Social networks from the same country of origin helped participants to maintain their culture, language, and teach youth who resettled in the U.S. at a young age:

“And we want our children or like future children to grow up knowing our culture and our language. Because if we don’t continue this, like, in the generations to come, we might lose our language and our culture.”

Cultural events, both initiated by communities and also sponsored by the city or other organizations with community facilitation, provided opportunities for people to learn about and celebrate their own cultures as well as other cultures. This was recommended by participants as a place where more support was needed:

“And so in some way if the community or if the municipality is able to support us … I think that really allows families, parents, you know, children to sort of understand their culture know, you know, where they’re from …”

Whereas some immigrant communities in Anchorage often organized events, others did not routinely organize events even though they desired to do so. Participants also noted that organization of events had varied over time. For example, several participants from the Hmong community noted the importance of the Hmong New Year’s event, which had not happened for a few years:

“... even though it’s once a year, we were able to come together as a community, spend a couple of days together just value our culture ... it gives that sense of community like hey, we’re the community, like we’re part of the Hmong community and this is what we do”

“... just acknowledge like hey, I am home you know I’m here ... this is the one time I’m able to come wear my traditional clothes, show my kids that this is what we do this is our culture.”

The major barrier to organizing events, such as New Year’s, was that organizing is unpaid volunteer work without sponsorship or fiscal support:

“We’re all working families nowadays. And it’s so just so hard to volunteer to find time to just, you know, give time if they’re not being reimbursed for so I don’t know I would say you know, we do need that big sponsor, the big sponsorship to enrich the Hmong culture.”
Social Networks Help with Navigation and Information Access

Participants reported supporting others within their social networks, especially with language barriers:

“My phone rings all the time. They say, ‘I need help with this transcript. Can you help me here? I have this document, can you help me fill it out?’”

Being connected to a social network helped participants integrate into the community:

“And then moving to Anchorage three months later, because of that connection with my husband at the time, and what organizations existed in Anchorage, I got connected right away with the Filipino community of Anchorage, which was really a great experience for me. … I felt really welcomed as a new immigrant to be part of an organization of other Filipinos…”

Indeed, family and friends—along with social media—were the most common ways participants reported getting access to information in Anchorage.

![Figure 14: The ways in which survey participants report getting information about what is happening in the community.](image-url)

Because nearly one in four survey participants (see figure on next page) reported discomfort interacting with news outlets, capitalizing on social networks to share information about what is happening in Anchorage appears critical.
Participants reported that they often reciprocated the support they got from community members when they arrived, ‘paying it forward’:

“... I am also volunteering as a person who helps other people because I struggled at first …”

“And you know, it, I keep thinking about and reflecting on how, what can I do to help new immigrants, you know, have not necessarily the same experience, but how can I contribute so that new immigrants would have a better experience, you know, getting jobs. And help them be knowledgeable about resources that are available in the state to help them.”

Some social networks also appeared to lead to volunteering and advocacy:

“And when I worked … as a caseworker, working with homeless kids, we also had refugees and foreigners that come in. And I think it was important to let them know that there are resources available out there that you can access if you feel like you’re discriminated. And also make sure that you know, I’m an advocate, you know, like, if you have any questions or whatever, or anything, I’m available.”

**Mentorship and Role Models**

Finally, having people from one’s own country of origin to look up to appeared to support immigrants’ integration and inclusion in Anchorage. However, because of Anchorage’s small immigrant populations from many different regions of the world, many participants shared stories of being one of the only people from their ethnic communities in school and work settings. Having more formal and informal structures to promote social connections was suggested by some participants to bridge this gap:

“... [in] my years of going to school, like there wasn’t anyone who was in college that I can look up to or like, you know, someone who’s Hmong and [there wasn’t] … like a Hmong club and in college or something ... It was just really me.”
Law Enforcement in Anchorage, Alaska

Mixed Experiences with Law Enforcement

Participants reported both positive and negative experiences with law enforcement officers. While some participants pointed to the positive interactions between the Anchorage Police Department (APD) and themselves, others reported points of tension, conflict, and fear.

Participants especially valued APD’s outreach efforts to immigrant communities. They appreciated APD’s outreach efforts as they helped educate community members on public safety and allowed them to know their rights:

“We brought them the resources to the community, not the community, going to the departments and ask questions. That was very, very effective, because they came to know what to say, you know. I just love the knowing your rights with the police. Because we had the defense lawyer there, we had public safety. We even had the chief of police and the public safety Commissioner in our forum at that time. Those are really, letting the people know their rights will be very important. You know, bringing resources to them. It’s nice as far as accommodation with the public safety”

Yet others perceived law enforcement as being discriminatory and biased. Some expressed concerns that the police had become increasingly militarized:

“The police officers are becoming more like military people, you know? They’re into this mode, and they forgot they’re humans and they’re dealing with citizens. I mean, they become really aggressive, some of them and, as with people, when you give them power, and they’re not prepared to handle the power, they can overdo it. Some officers, you know, [practice] the profiling kind of thing. You know, once you’re Latin and you have a beer? Oh, you must be drunk, you know.”
This approach to policing, coupled with previous experiences with law enforcement in the U.S. and in their countries of origin, left some immigrants fearing the police:

“Maria [pseudonym] said she’s afraid of police. Since she was young. Every time she sees a police car, you know, her body starts shaking and she has a phobia.”

**Language and Law Enforcement and Judicial System Experiences**

Language barriers contributed to participants’ negative experiences with law enforcement. One participant recalled an instance he witnessed where the language barrier prevented an individual from being able to understand police orders:

“I seen firsthand … when the only person that could help [a] kid that was having an issue was probably a guy that spoke fluently to the kid. And the reason why the kid understood what to do and got down was because that guy did not walk away. He stood there and keep yelling orders to the kid so he could understand what [the police] were saying to him … He did not understand what they were saying.”

Language barriers within the judicial system were also noted:

“With Filipinos’ experiences with the judicial system … the language barrier was a big issue. Perhaps they ended up getting the sentences that they didn’t deserve because even with interpreters … translation in and of itself is not enough. Because sometimes there are, you know, words or situations that cannot be translated into English. And so, you know, the language barrier is still an issue.”

**Figure 17: Survey participants’ comfort level interacting with the justice system.**
Crime and Safety

Some participants also reported a sense that Alaska had become increasingly violent, unsafe, and less tolerant. Domestic violence, gang-related violence, and bullying in schools contributed to this sense of insecurity and violence in Alaska:

“But in 1997, we all know that Alaska went on a map for gang violence. So that was my experience as a as a young man that arrived in Alaska with the dream of becoming, you know, somebody and having a future here in Alaska. But then I arrived here my young people were not doing that. They were involved in things that that strayed them from the good things of life.”

“You know, the bullying in the school or like drug-using and sex and stuff like that. And I don’t really hear anything like this directly. But like I said, my, my son is 16. So he’d hear things, and he sees things and, and things like this happened in school. And he is not part of it. And he has no desire to participate, and which is kind of great, is actually really great. Some of the questions, some of the things, that he told me what happened in school, I’d be like, wow. And he tells me that it’s actually pretty normal. And then with other schools, actually even worse, and just because we live in a pretty good and stable and steady neighborhood. And so yeah, just like a normal teenage thing that happened in school.”
Health Care in Anchorage, Alaska

Healthcare Systems are Difficult to Navigate
The difficulty of accessing quality health care arose again and again across focus groups. Many barriers to getting adequate health care were echoed in the survey results. Barriers included:

- Cost,
- Language,
- Lack of knowledge,
- Difficulty understanding the information shared by health care providers, and
- Constraints in the medical system.

Insurance is Complicated and Care is Expensive, but Available
Nearly one in ten survey participants reported not having health insurance. Some immigrants were directly barred from health insurance due to their lack of immigration authorization, which frequently barred them from care.

“We had almost no experience with the medical system because we don’t have any health insurance. And we have no right to get ill here, because we know about the costs of if you get ill or if you get injured.”
Focus group participants also described not being familiar with the U.S.’s health insurance system pre-migration, and not getting easily comprehensible information about health insurance after arriving in the U.S. **How to determine the best health insurance plan and how to make annual changes to plans were not intuitive.**

Participants also shared how difficult it was to access care because changes in health insurance necessitated changes in health care providers:

“I do feel that we have less doctors for Medicare or Medicaid patients, because my dad when he retired, he had Medicare, but he got kicked out of his primary facility doctor because that place doesn’t take Medicare or Medicaid.”

Participants were thankful that health care services were available regardless of ability to pay, but indicated needing to do a great deal of research to avoid surprise bills.

**Language Access Impacted Health Care Quality**

Unique challenges navigating health care emerged due to **language barriers**. Not having medical services available in a language participants spoke was detrimental. One participant shared an experience that could have turned deadly due to lack of language access:

“I was pregnant. And then I have my boy, and I have to stop for a while going to English classes. And when I was pregnant, and then I have my baby. It was really hard for me because I was by myself and I got depression. And I was crying for everything. I feel super lonely, I feel not able to take care of my son because I remember one day my son, he always got a super high fever. And one time when he got the shots for the two months, he had a high fever and then his nails turned blue. And I have to call the 911 and at that time there are no interpreters, nothing, and I was not able to explain what happened with my son. And I will say like, I just I remember that I said just, ‘Toes are blueberry, and ah, like, blue, dark blue.’ And while they figure it out, and then I, they, I remember they give me instructions that I didn’t understand. And I remember that I felt super bad, that I said, ‘I don’t want to live here.’ I felt like I was not capable to survive.”
Participants frequently described a need for more interpreters in all healthcare settings and a need for more information about accessing interpretation and translation services. There appeared to be rampant misinformation about language access, such as that the services require payment from the patient rather than being provided by the healthcare system or practitioner:

“But, you know, by experience a lot of the agencies especially in the medical field, they need to know that you have to have [interpretation], the resource there and offer it and letting people know that the interpreting service language services are offered for free and people sometimes don’t want to do that because they have to pay for an interpreter you know?”

Another participant who was also a healthcare professional discussed these issues:

“Whether it's like a doctor’s appointment, or therapy appointment, or anything, that interpretation is offered [automatically by the provider] – not [waiting] for the person that is seeing them [to ask for interpretation]. The doctor or the therapist [should] offer it instead of just waiting until the person asks, because 90% of the time, none of my clients know how to ask [for interpretation]. I practice with them. I tell them, say it to me, ‘I need an interpreter,’ and they shouldn’t have to. … If you get somebody in front of you who doesn’t speak English, [you should ask], ‘What language do you need?’ That should be your first question. Well, that’s always my first question.”

Many Constraints in the Medical System Prevented Timely Care
Participants reported that other constraints in the medical system also impeded quality, timely care. For example, participants shared that a lack of coordination within the medical system made it difficult to access all of the services they needed and get appropriate referrals in a timely manner. Participants also spoke about the need to travel for medical services and even the need to leave the state to access specialty services. Frequently there were not enough medical providers for the care that was required, leading to long wait times for services. While participants understood issues that led to these constraints, the issues still prevented care:

“We don’t have the population to use those kind of services probably, too costly, you know, the money to have a lab or to have a certain kind of, you know, treatment. That they’re so expensive and probably fly to another, you know, Seattle is the closest one, is um, cost…”

Feeling Misunderstood and Not Cared For
A few participants described that challenges in care went beyond the previously described barriers to truly feeling that their providers did not listen to their concerns:
“My mom has been going to hospitals, and it’s been 10 years is still sick. Doctors don’t know what’s going on with her. They say that she’s fine. She says she’s not fine. So like, I don’t know, like how their system works. And I don’t know what’s going on. And I don’t know who to believe like, I don’t know if I should believe the doctor or should I believe my mom. But like others I [have] seen other immigrants also have different problems, like the same things. ... And after they go to a doctor’s visit, they end up having other problems.”

Some participants attributed a lack of care and concern to potential biases and assumptions providers made about them:

“I just wished that we could like, turn it upside down. And like, restructure them because it was never built for us. And I think I want to tell the state that out loud, it was never built for [BIPOC] people. And so therefore, it is important that we need to change that.”

**Trust and Mistrust of the Healthcare System**

Trust was described as essential to having a positive experience in care.

Unfortunately, however, all of these challenges compounded and frequently led to discomfort interacting with and sometimes mistrust of the healthcare system, delaying care and keeping patients from having transparent interactions with their health care providers.

Approximately 1 in 4 survey participants indicated discomfort interacting with the healthcare system and less than 1 in 3 indicated complete comfort.

**Figure 21:** Survey participants’ comfort level interacting with the medical system.
A Person-Centered Approach to Health Care is Needed

Participants spoke about how power shaped their care experiences, with many participants deferring to health care providers in spite of not understanding or being able to communicate effectively:

“It’s still hard to explain what she’s feeling what hurts, you know, and sometimes she couldn’t understand the doctors. And the other thing is that if she had to go to a non-English speaking or non-Filipino doctor, she won’t ask questions. And so we have to be there. Because I think there’s also this, another effect of colonial mentality that she thinks whatever the doctor says is right, and she’ll just say yes. And sometimes she just, ‘Yes.’ She doesn’t even know what she’s saying yes to, you know, she’ll just say yes, so we need to be with her when we go to an appointment.”

When patients had access to health care providers from their cultural backgrounds and who spoke their languages, their care experience was transformed for the better as they felt more comfortable in sharing their concerns and were able to have open communication with their providers. One participant who worked in health care shared their observations:

“I have good relationship with my co-workers since I started to work here. Because you know they have a big trust with Filipino workers, especially nurses, because they have compassion and they have patience. And you know they can speak English. So all my co-workers they really trust with us especially Filipino. And mostly they wanted to hire more Filipinos here in Anchorage. So, and also I was trained in the Philippines as a registered nurse for five years. And when I came here, I’m really happy that I was trained there and then work continuously here as a nurse. So there’s a lot of needs here in Anchorage and also if there’s a medical doctor? Oh they love medical doctors also from the Philippines!”

While it is not always possible to have health care providers match their patients, advocates, interpreters, health care outreach, and patient education connected to the health care system were seen as ways of supporting patients to effectively communicate and advocate for their needs.

Asking questions and doing research helped participants inform themselves and contributed to a more positive interaction with the healthcare system.
Most people who participated in the survey shared that they owned their home. This rate (58%) is slightly lower than the Anchorage population (approximately 63%). A few people who participated in the survey indicated living in temporary housing situations.

**Navigating Housing**

Participants emphasized how reliable housing is an integral aspect of their well-being:

"Having a roof over my head made my life easier."

Participants also mentioned how already having family members in Anchorage that could provide housing was incredibly helpful when moving to and adjusting to life in Anchorage:

"What was easy for us is that we had a place to live when we came here. Because we lived with my mother-in-law when we came here, so it's free."

**Housing Types and Quality**

While the majority of survey participants indicated that their house was safe and comfortable, a sizable portion (8%) described their housing as unsafe (see next page).
Some focus group participants discussed how living in multigenerational homes align with their cultural values. However, participants also mentioned how living in multigenerational homes is a necessity rather than a choice due to high housing costs in Anchorage and the low-wage jobs that are often available to immigrants:

“... you will see ... multiple [families] in one house ... part of it [is] because of the culture. And yes, we do like to live in communities, just like other people and other cultures. But then also, it's because of the incomes, it's because [of the] kind of jobs that we can afford, you know, like, Anchorage is very expensive. And so like, if you have just two people in that, in your house that is working, you know, like, most likely you're gonna have your brother, your sister, your cousin's coming in to help you to afford that place.”
The Impact of COVID-19 in Anchorage, Alaska

COVID-19 Information

Some participants reported having difficulty accessing information about COVID-19 because it was not always made available in the languages they spoke. Some also felt that their communities were completely erased from COVID-19 data reporting:

“It almost felt like we were erased from data in regard to the Coronavirus. And it was almost like we didn’t really exist. But when you look at the data, it’s very obvious that we are dying at a higher rate, you know versus our population.”

COVID-19’s Impact on Social Networks

Participants shared that COVID-19 impacted their ability to connect with others in and outside their communities. COVID-19 had upended the regular contacts and meetings that were common ways for people to connect with each other. Communal gatherings that involved dance, cooking, and music have been suspended as a result of COVID-19:

“I think one of the things that I miss most about this whole COVID was when you would have these [cultural gatherings]. They would happen once a month at the library where you would talk about somebody from a specific part of our community would come in and have food and dance or talk about what they’re doing and invite the community and it gave people a chance to sort of see what our community is all about.”

Likewise, participants shared that organizations that were trying to reach the immigrant community in order to build integration and inclusion had found it increasingly difficult as the venues which were regular gathering places for immigrants have been suspended. As a result, COVID-19 had made it harder to break down barriers and build understanding and tolerance among and between communities in Alaska.

COVID-19’s Impact on Education

Participants also related the impact of COVID-19 on the education of their children. While some saw an increase in the number of online programs to support the education of their children, others saw their children struggle to learn remotely. Shifting to online learning took away the regular in-person contact that worked best for some children. Online learning was especially hard for those children who were still adjusting to the school environment or needing in-person support to acquire English proficiency:
“My kids are still adjusting to the new school systems - and then COVID hit, and then that’s kind of strange at this moment. What? There are no classes that meet [in person], no, just everything is online. That is hard for my kids at this moment.”

COVID-19’s Impact on Health
Some participants reported that COVID-19 further exposed disparities in access to health care. Some participants were not able to access the health care that they needed as a result of online bookings, telehealth, and a lack of interpretation services. Due to technology being unequally available to immigrants, some participants reported difficulties accessing health care through new modes:

“My daughter was having an issue with her bug bites and they’re saying she’s not critical enough. And they won’t see her. I was like these infections, she could die. And so finally [we] have to do teledoctor thing. And so they had to look at it over the iPhone like FaceTime to diagnose it that way. So as far as the health care, it’s a lot more like what an inconvenience because they don’t see you in person”

COVID-19’s Impact on Services
Finally, COVID-19 also made it more difficult for some participants to access public services. As many public offices moved to remote work, some participants felt deprived of the human connection which they relied on to access services. This was especially challenging for those with limited language abilities:

“Instead of receiving email, or the mails that saying, whatever, especially for foreign people, I’m sure they have a difficult to read it, or understand what’s going on. And by that, you know, for me, I like to talk to someone, but, you know, even with leaving the message, it’s very difficult to have somebody call me back, or be on the line, because I just wanted to wait on the line to reach someone.”

Technology Access & Digital Literacy
Both access to technology and literacy in the technology were critical for access to all public services, including education, health care, and other services.
Experiences of Exclusion in Anchorage, Alaska

Prejudice and Discrimination Over Time in a Diverse City

While Anchorage is an incredibly diverse city, participants reported that the diversity they brought was not always welcomed. Many participants reported both witnessing and directly experiencing prejudice and discrimination in Anchorage on the basis of their appearance, religion, and language. Many shared that the city had seemed to become more exclusionary and intolerant of diversity over the past decade:

“I went 10 years in English before someone actually used a profanity at me for my faith. So I definitely see the downward spiral. I see the polarization that is impacting our society. And in that sense, I see the change and it’s not that great.”

“And what I have seen happen lately is a lot more intolerance taking place. And intolerance against the native population against other people that are not in majority, and as bothersome to me, because we used to be a pretty tolerant society here in Anchorage for the state as a whole.”

Participants reported witnessing prejudice and discrimination not only against immigrants, but also other Black individuals, Indigenous individuals, and People of Color.

Negative Experiences Based on Language

Language barriers were one of the biggest challenges immigrants faced. In Anchorage, many participants reported facing unjust treatment across settings based on their lack of English proficiency. For example, due to limited language resources presented to students, many participants remarked on experiences in which their or their children’s needs were misunderstood. Lack of language resources also created barriers to learning, being understood, and being successful in school. Being treated worse than others based on language also extended to workplaces:

“I work hard. And I am not confrontational. And I always feel that I have to prove myself because I cannot speak English as other people do. And this can have some, I mean, I have to compensate this variance by working harder.”

While federal laws are in place to prevent such negative treatment based on language, participants reported not having access to language resources in health care as well:

“When you were pregnant, they give you a book for milestones for the kids. I asked for in Spanish. And I remember that a lady looked at me and say you’re in America, you have to speak English.”
Prejudice and discrimination based on language occurred across other settings in Anchorage as well, such as public services, gathering spaces, and shops:

“I remember being at a, at a restaurant, and I was talking to my mom and we were speaking in Spanish because my mom doesn’t speak English. And somebody was just started yelling at me at the restaurant. Some pretty mean things about you know, Spanish, and like this, and that and like, gotta be talking in English and whatnot.”

Language was the key to being treated negatively and excluded in Anchorage. It appeared that many Anchorage residents, including those in positions of power, treated immigrants as ‘other’ based on their level of English proficiency. Negative experiences most frequently were discussed in three spaces: education, employment, and government.

**Negative Experiences in Schools**

Many participants reported experiences of what appeared to be discrimination in the school system, either directly to themselves or to members of their families. Negative experiences came both from school staff and students:

“And I remember going to school being bullied being called a ‘jap chink’. And the biggest thing is asking me, ‘Do I speak English?’”

Negative treatment extended to immigrant teachers as well:

“And so the school in my area – high school – has one very good [redacted] teacher. And she has, she has her background comes from a certain area where, my daughters, all three of them, had to step up and defend her because of the students really throwing racial slurs at her... And it was just it was so sad. Because she was a really good teacher, I thought. And yeah, and her last name didn’t help either.”

**Negative Experiences in Workplaces**

While workplaces in the U.S. encourage diversity, participants revealed that some of their employers judged their employees based on their language proficiency, cultural assimilation, and race/ethnicity. Other participants stated that they did not feel any discrimination in their workplace. Many who reported discrimination noticed how job opportunities seemed to diminish for immigrants and particularly People of Color as they attempted to advance in their professions.

“I think it depends on the professions, and the profession for your institutions, like, probably you and me the kind of higher education side, or, you know, the higher bureaucracy side, when you see the all the tops, all or most of them are white, you know, the white people, and then I don’t see any supervisors up higher up any higher ups in the any, any color, any colored peoples or Black and Brown peoples, any
immigrants in my higher ups, and then that’s so the, so that’s kind of the bias you have.”

“Any ethnicity was not part of that management positions. You were not part of that up their leadership where you have private meetings, those doors were always closed to only certain people that were having the conversation there… when I went to go find a job, they will not give me a management position for something that I could do.”

**Negative Experiences with Government Services**

Most participants reported neutral to positive experiences with government services, including with the police. However, some of the participants still experienced unjust treatment, particularly from the police, related to their language and appearance:

“Well, I think it was, they said FBI or something. We got arrested. Just because we did not have our citizenship with us. [Someone gasps.] …They searched everywhere. I don’t know what kind of information they received. So and we were like talking and one of the person can’t speak English well, so I was like, telling her in Korean, you know what’s going on? And they said, 'No speaking, if you’re going to speak, speak English.' And I said, 'Well, she can’t speak English well, so I’m trying to explain to her.' They say, 'No, don’t do that.' So we were like sitting there and like, maybe like, 10 minutes later, we realized that this is real.”

A couple of participants called for change in the policing system to treat everyone with respect:

“Police system really needs to change. There’s a huge change that needs to happen in Alaska as far as the police. There’s, there’s definitely a huge difference in treating different cultures, when it comes to the police. Um, luckily, there’s probably one or two Samoan that are actually serving in the APD today. And I can tell you that it can definitely take can probably say that the system is rigged, or the system is not right.”

On the other hand, other government services were seen as generally fair for many participants. For example, one participant shared that she did not feel any discrimination while accessing services:

“In terms of access to places of public accommodations, restaurants, community centers, theaters, let’s say the performing arts center, churches … Um, I have not experienced that.”
Of course, staff in these agencies are all humans whose behaviors are heavily influenced by the society and the people they have interactions with, which a number of participants recognized:

“\textit{I agree it's a mix batch just like Anchorage, anywhere in the world. You know, you're gonna get the good people, the bad people the you know, that treat others well, the ones that don't treat others well. And it's gonna come up in jobs too. Because this, you know, people that are police are just people to. And so if you already are prone to certain views its going to come up in your job too.}”

In sum, \textbf{many participants experienced exclusion} in some form in Anchorage, often related to prejudice and discrimination based on their \textbf{language}, and also based on their \textbf{appearance, religion, and differences in cultural practices}. 
Developing a Sense of Home in Anchorage, Alaska

The Impact of Welcoming

A key factor in developing a sense of home in Anchorage, Alaska was feeling welcomed into the community. For many, this meant being in a diverse community where others were respectful of peoples’ differences:

“And then like, all throughout high school, people were a lot more like, aware of like diversity and like, you know, that people are different, but we’ll still be saying, like, we’re all human. So be a lot nicer about that.”

Welcoming also included access to resources that are critical for becoming integrated and included, such as having access to information to navigate the community, interpretation services, support for basic needs, and cultural and social resources:

“So when I came to Alaska, the challenges was the language. Because at the beginning, we don’t know the language. So it was hard to understand. But you know, the people in the office, they helped us a lot. And there are some people who are from the Sudanese community, they help us too.”

Welcoming came from social service organizations, workplaces, educational systems, and government structures, and often incorporated not only material resources but social support and information sharing. For example, the local refugee resettlement center provided a sense of welcoming for many refugees:

“Anchorage people is so beautiful. So kind. … We can go to Catholic Social Services and we got a lot of support with them. You know, we got ourselves a volunteer and … little by little we change our life and then now … we got more support.”

Welcoming also came from friendships and other social connections:

“Anchorage is my second home. The people in Anchorage [are] part of my family. They are very supporting and very kind. They encourage you to learn and to grow. To guide you, navigate you. I really appreciate them and what they do. For me and for my community, it’s very nice people in Anchorage. It’s a better place to live in Anchorage.”

The Impact of Time

Feeling a sense of home in Anchorage and Alaska more broadly developed over a long period of time for most participants, often to their surprise:
“We enjoy living here. And it’s taken time to get used to it.”

Frequently this sense of home was described as something that happened unexpectedly:

“I found myself in a place that ended up as my home now and [it is] very hard to go back home. I call Alaska now home for me.”

Children and adults alike often did not expect to feel at home in the community and were surprised by how they came to view the area as home.

“Coming to Alaska, my first three months as a teenager I will have to say I was very depressed. No friends. You know, it was just all new - new school, new home, new place. I had to explore everything new. … But having to live here, you know, over 10 years now it’s a wonderful state. I don’t think that I would be able to want to go back and live where I came from.”

**The Impact of Climate**

One primary aspect of viewing Alaska as home was its climate. For many, this sense of climate fit was counterintuitive, as they at first viewed the snow and cold as a difficult transition, but then came to appreciate not only the **weather**, but the **outdoors spaces** and overall **climate** of the region over time:

“I love the nature here and beautiful summer. I don’t miss the busy road where I used to live.”

**The Impact of Comparisons**

Often participants began to define Anchorage and Alaska as home when they stepped outside of the city and state:

“And I started traveling the world. I’m grateful for the experience here in Alaska. But I started traveling the world. And I saw that there was other places in the world, I was worse than Alaska. And it’s the reason why I came back to Alaska.”

In describing how they came to stay in the community and came to view it as home, a number of participants compared Alaska to other options they had considered or other places they had experienced:

“I like the weather … compared to the lower 48. I feel like I’m gonna stay here. I’m gonna continue to work hard and stay here. … I don’t see myself going back to live in the lower 48 because the police and over there [it] is too warm.”

Others remarked on how Anchorage was significantly more diverse than other places they had lived and spoke positively about the diversity they experienced as compared to other parts of the country and world:
“And I was literally in the Bible Belt. So coming here, I saw the diversity and I saw differences of not just ethnicities, but faiths also. And being back in South I used to be the only Muslim kid in school. And here I see there's so many different ethnicities and different religions and all that. So that was very refreshing.”

**The Impact of Family**

Frequently, a sense of home developed from creating and/or raising a family in the community. For some this meant finding a partner in the community:

“When I was little you know when we first moved here I did my goal was to move back when I hit 18 but then you know, things have turned [since] I've met my now husband.”

For others, this meant having children:

“Alaska is definitely home now that I've established a family. … I just think that it's a great place to raise a family.”

And for others, this meant raising children and grandchildren in the community, whether they were born in the area or immigrated with the family:

“Whenever [my kids] see the beautiful scenery, set your eyes down or, you know, [see] the beautiful environment, they take a picture. So I asked them, are you guys still emotional with the scenery? And they said yes. So my expectation is the kids to have calm emotions and senses. And I think they all have that [here].”

The decision to stay in the area, as well as feeling at home, came from viewing the community and surrounding area as a good environment for their family:

“Alaska also feels like a place that is healthy to raise a family, which makes it feel like home.”

“So in Alaska, when we came to Alaska, my kids never got a cold, that is the best part.”

**The Impact of Sense of Connection and Belonging**

Learning more about the history of the region and feeling connected to the communities was highlighted by a couple of participants as a way they began to feel at home. For example, for one this meant learning about Indigenous cultures and understanding how her story intertwined:

“And just knowing the story and feeling part of this story makes a whole huge difference. So I still love and respect and connect to my culture, my background, my origin, but I also share this place and I feel like I belong here as well.”
The Impact of Opportunities to Shape the Community

While participants frequently described challenges that occurred in their community and state and saw them as works in progress, it was the opportunity to influence and contribute to the spaces that helped participants define the communities as home:

“If we’re gonna call Alaska home, we want to be able to live in a community that is fair. … We want to be able to put our kids in an education system that is that is fair, rather than being treated, because of the skin color. … And people just need to value people for being people, rather than the color of their skin or what language they speak or where they’re from, it does not matter where you’re from anymore. This is America. When I serve this country, it is because I want everybody to be able to live free.”

Often when participants felt welcome and at home, they then turned to shaping the community and creating a welcoming environment for others:

“I’m turning back into my community now, my status in a hub of my community.”
**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on these findings, we make the following key recommendations to enhance the integration and inclusion of immigrants in Anchorage.

**Language Access**

- Limited language access was the primary barrier to engagement in the community, including both accessing community services and contributing to the community through work. Although Title V of the Civil Rights Act requires that any setting that accepts federal funding provides equal access, including through interpretation and translation, such access is not always provided. This may be related to a lack of knowledge and/or resources. Therefore, both training on language access and funding for language access (interpretation and translation) should be increased throughout the municipality.

- Language interpretation and translation options are limited in Anchorage. Expand interpretation services to include in-person, telephonic, and video conferencing options to suit varied needs and preferences of the Anchorage community. As possible, train and employ local community members as professional interpreters and translators so that they understand local vocabulary and cultural references in order to provide effective interpretation while also bolstering career opportunities for immigrants in Anchorage.

- Interpretation is a complex task that takes time and needs to be well-integrated into services. Provide specialized training to service providers – including, for example, school staff, medical providers, police officers, and public employees – in effectively working with interpreters.

- To aid in community navigation, signs must be clearer. Public communication should strive to use simple, clear language that may be more easily understood. Moreover, simple visuals can be utilized to support communication across languages. The Olympics signage provides examples of such visual communication.

- Many new community members wish to learn English. However, there can be barriers to engagement in English learning opportunities, such as limited time to commit to classes and lack of awareness of available opportunities. Therefore, distribute more information about English learning opportunities and resources, particularly
through social networks. Programs should take into consideration variations in dialects, accents, and slang to accommodate language needs. **Funding for more English programs and classes** should also be increased to support their work so that classes can be made available when students are available. The [Alaska Literacy Program](#) is an example of one such non-profit organization that provides English literacy classes to adults.

- Coming to understand the community expectations and norms can be a stressor and prevent engagement in community services and other functions. Therefore, language training should also incorporate **cultural training** in order to help immigrants to understand cultural norms in Anchorage and the U.S. in general. Those training sessions may focus on different contexts. For instance, how to communicate with others while seeing a doctor, going to the post office, interacting with police, attending a wedding or funeral, and opening a bank account.

### PreK-12 Education

- Language access has improved in the Anchorage School District in recent years. The [Language Support Center](#) is an important resource for families. Nonetheless, some families continued to report difficulties communicating with schools. Because families may not be in a position to advocate for the language access they need, the onus should be on school staff to ensure that both written and spoken school communication is available in the languages in which families are fluent.

- Many parents want to engage in their children’s education but may experience language barriers. Children should not be responsible for interpreting for their parents. Provide interpreters at all parent-teacher conferences and any other interactions with parents. This ensures that parents who are speakers of other languages are able to actively engage in their children’s education.

- Social networks are critical to families receiving information and navigating new settings. Continue to work with cultural brokers to develop and maintain relationships with immigrant families in tandem with individual schools and their staff.

- The Anchorage School District is recognized for having many options available to students and families. The [English Language Learners Program](#) and Language Support Center staff are helpful for newcomers and should be well-resourced. Continue to provide education on navigating the public school system to families new to the community. The wide variety of engagement opportunities is overwhelming.
for some families. Therefore, staff should maintain contacts and support immigrant families over a longer period of time with follow-up check-ins.

- Some immigrants reported that they and/or their children had difficulties in coursework not due to the content, but due to their language fluency. Although some children may be in specialized programs for English language learning, many will be in general education courses across the district. However, teachers are often not specifically trained to work with students with limited English literacy. School districts across the nation report few in-service trainings on working with English language learners. Therefore, **training should be provided for all teachers and school staff across grade levels on how to best support English language learners.**

- Balancing English learning with other content learning can be difficult. While English language courses are an important foundation for students, the ways in which they are implemented may pull students from other aspects of the school curriculum. As possible, provide further integration of English language learner courses into the school curriculum to allow students to fully benefit.

- Families perceive that efforts towards diversity, equity, and inclusion differ across schools. Therefore, the Anchorage School District should consider providing more **diversity training at a district level** in order to honor and respect diverse cultural norms and values of all students across the district.

- Some immigrant parents in this study expressed an interest in sharing their feedback with school district leadership but did not know how to do so. Leadership may find it helpful to **reach out to immigrant families through trusted partners** within the school district and in ways that decrease barriers to participation.

**Adult Education**

- Many immigrants have considerable education and training from their countries of origin. However, their credentials are not always recognized in the United States. Create more **career advancement opportunities** by supporting retrieval of educational and professional documents and offering on-the-job language training.
• While education opportunities for children abound, they are considerably more difficult for adults to come by. Consider non-traditional ways of career training and educational advancement such as Apprenticeships and Integrated Education and Training models.

• Although higher education can provide many opportunities, it can be a challenging system to navigate as an immigrant or international student. Higher education institutions, such as the University of Alaska Anchorage, should increase their support for international students, including both pre- and post-arrival. This should include both practical support (such as navigating housing, transportation, and financial aid) as well as cultural and social support. Some universities have done this through cultural orientations and peer mentorship programs that pair local resident students with international students to help foster cross-cultural connections and provide social support.

• Similar to primary and secondary education, higher education institutions should provide diversity training to their administration, faculty, and staff in order to honor and respect the diverse cultural norms and values of everyone in the campus community.

Work

• Many immigrants have the skills and experience of working in positions that require specialized education and training. However, their credentials are not always recognized in the U.S. and Alaska, making it challenging for them to work in the professions they trained for. To increase employment access, employers should consider removing barriers such as waiving GED/high school diploma requirements as a condition for employment. Employers would also benefit from finding avenues to measure international work experience as equivalent to specific training so that they could expand their workforce by hiring qualified immigrant employees.

• Employers may have little awareness of these alternatives, however. Therefore, the municipality and community partners should promote learning opportunities for employers to increase awareness of the benefits of creating and supporting job entry pathways for immigrants. This should include an overview of the international credential process to increase acceptance and validate competency levels of potential employees.
Upon arrival many immigrants find work immediately to support themselves and often this is a federal requirement for migration. Many of these jobs, however, are low-wage and may not align with immigrants’ career goals, interests, and skills. Language barriers, cultural differences, and limited connections make professional growth challenging. Therefore, offering a centralized location for job support and networking opportunities for immigrants to ease the search in finding a profession and training opportunities would be beneficial. Such a center could also provide support around transfers of international certification and credentialing. Center staff could be trained to work with English language learners and people with limited digital literacy. Currently there is no agency or institution providing this service in Anchorage. Job centers and libraries may be the best fitting places to support career development in these ways. An example of how other cities have provided this to their immigrant communities is through what are known as Welcome Back Centers. The YMCA Newcomer Information Centre in Toronto, Canada is also an example of this kind of comprehensive navigation service.

Language by far is a top barrier in career advancement. Many immigrants in this study expressed English fluency being a requirement for job positions. Attainment of English proficiency needed for a particular industry takes time. Providing more opportunities for integrated English learning (including paid on-the-job English language training) meets this need. Integrated Education and Training (IET) models in Anchorage that tailor their programming to English language learners, such as the IET Pre-Apprenticeship Training in Healthcare (PATH) Academy, should be replicated in other industries.

Social and Cultural Networks

Many immigrant communities wish to maintain their cultural traditions and foster a sense of community through cultural gatherings. However, busy schedules and limited resources make it difficult to organize such events. Both public and private sectors should work together to provide funding for communities to organize cultural events, including paying for organizers’ time.

Older immigrants appear to be less integrated into the community. There should be more structured support for older immigrants, in particular, to ensure their integration and inclusion in the community. For example, Senior Centers could provide additional multilingual outreach and implement culturally congruent programming to support immigrant community members.
• Many immigrants learn what is happening in Anchorage and how to navigate life in the community through their social networks, and particularly people recognized as community leaders. These social networks help people navigate work, education, health care, and other resources. Additional fiscal and technical support is needed to develop and maintain these social networks.

• Community integration can also be strengthened through cross-cultural connections. Positive cross-cultural relationships develop from the opportunity to become members of small groups - whether they be leisure activities, education, or work. These groups allow people to have common experiences, to benefit from and to contribute to each other, and to form understandings of one another. Therefore, increase support for multicultural events and networking opportunities to increase the social integration between immigrants and U.S.-born people.

• Approximately half of the immigrants in this study reported accessing public libraries. Libraries play an integral role in the community, both as an information hub and as a gathering space. Libraries can also establish and/or bolster their sections to introduce readings from different cultures. Librarians can work with local immigrant communities to host events on introducing their cultures, such as they have previously done through Tradition Tuesdays.

**Government & Local Law Enforcement**

• Immigrants in this study report gaining information through social networks and online social media platforms. Consequently, the municipal government should prioritize sustaining relationships with immigrant community leaders to amplify public information. Multilingual outreach through social media platforms should also be prioritized.

• Many immigrants did not see themselves reflected in the government workforce. Therefore, the municipal government should continue to hire a more representative workforce in government and law enforcement at all levels, including executive positions. Routine audits of the hiring and promotion process should be conducted to identify any systemic biases.
• Immigrants also expressed having and witnessing negative interactions with law enforcement officers that appeared to be discriminatory. Linguistic and cultural differences seemed to contribute to these negative experiences. Additional intercultural communication and language access training for law enforcement officers may help them more effectively serve immigrants from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

• Immigrants in this project expressed that they value the Anchorage Police Department’s outreach efforts to immigrant communities on public safety that also allow immigrants to know their rights and how to interact with law enforcement. Continuing and expanding these efforts should be prioritized.

**Health Care**

• Barriers to accessing healthcare services were around transportation, time constraints, and limited knowledge about what services exist and how to access them. To address these challenges, health systems should provide health services in non-traditional locations, such as schools and community centers, to increase access to care. Health outreach events, including health fairs, may also increase awareness of services and healthcare access.

• A sizable portion of immigrants in this study did not have health insurance. Many immigrants who had health insurance reported that the U.S. insurance system is incredibly difficult to navigate. High costs are a primary barrier to accessing health care. Increasing public education about health insurance, health insurance navigators, and sliding fee scale services for those without insurance may help to bridge this gap.

• Health information is often complex, difficult to understand, and limited to English. This impedes immigrants’ abilities to make informed health care decisions. Health care settings should thus provide patient-centered, culturally and linguistically appropriate care.

• Many immigrants report experiences of feeling misunderstood and poor-quality care. Innovative community programs are working to build stronger partnerships and collaboration between health systems and immigrants to address this. Expand and strengthen successful models, such as Community Health Workers and Peer Leader Navigators, which have helped to reach immigrant populations, address misinformation, and close gaps in utilization of care.
• Immigrants in this study expressed the positive difference it has made to see a care provider who shares a similar cultural background and lived experience. Identify and address barriers to workforce entry to increase diversity in health care from immigrant communities. Not only does this address patients’ negative experiences, but also provides opportunities from the vast pool of immigrants who are internationally trained health workers. All healthcare workers should have ongoing training in cultural competence to support their service delivery.

**Housing**

• Although most immigrants who participated in this study reported safe housing, a sizable portion did not. Moreover, finding affordable housing remains a challenge, as safe and quality housing options are limited and waiting lists for housing voucher programs are long. Ongoing efforts are needed to ensure affordable housing is available to everyone in our community.

• Information about low-income housing is also difficult to find because it is in different places, including Cook Inlet Housing, NeighborWorks, and Alaska Housing Finance Corporation. Creating a centralized platform where people can access information on current low-income listings would be helpful.

• Housing information is often only available in English and is complex. Providing multilingual information, listings, and applications in simple terms online and in print may help mitigate language and digital literacy barriers.

• High application fees are especially prohibitive to low-income immigrant families. In addition, stringent income threshold requirements further prevent immigrants from renting and getting approved for mortgages. Furthermore, housing vouchers expire if the prospective tenant cannot locate housing that accepts the voucher by a certain date. There is, therefore, a need to revisit these policies that disproportionately harm low-income immigrant families.

• More public awareness is needed regarding tenant rights and landlord responsibilities. Valuable information provided by organizations like Alaska Legal Services should be increased and made available in all languages.
Impact of COVID-19

- COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted immigrants in Anchorage. Throughout the pandemic, it has been difficult for immigrants with limited English literacy to access accurate information and find resources such as testing, vaccinations, and emergency care. With input from immigrant leaders and immigrant-serving organizations, the Municipality formerly provided weekly COVID audio updates in 19 different languages shared on YouTube. However, such information has not been provided since September 30, 2021. This program should be restarted.

- COVID-19 has changed many aspects of our lives. Programs to increase digital literacy and provide high-speed internet at an affordable rate are needed to increase equitable access to online education, telehealth, and remote work opportunities.

- COVID-19 impacted the ability to connect with others in and outside their communities. Additional municipal support can help immigrant communities reorganize events and increase social support.

- The Alaska Department of Health and Social Services and Anchorage Health Department collect COVID-19 data. Improved disaggregated data on COVID-19’s impact on the immigrant population is needed to better understand health inequities, facilitate timely interventions, and support recovery.

- When planning public health recommendations and setting policies, experts should consider the living situations and daily lives of immigrants. For example, isolation and quarantine recommendations are not easily feasible for the many multigenerational immigrant families in this study who reported living together.

Sense of Home

- Anchorage is home to many immigrants. In spite of the challenges many immigrants face navigating the community, they intend to stay, raise their families, and contribute to the social, economic, and civic life of the city and state. It is, therefore, upon all of us to maintain and build out the policies and practices that celebrate diversity, promote inclusion and integration, and ensure that Anchorage is a welcoming city to all.