

Immigrants are usually in better health than native Canadians... at least when they arrive

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Research has shown that the health of immigrants is generally better than that of citizens of their host country, at least on their arrival and for some time afterwards. But a team of researchers in Montreal has found that this is not true of all groups of immigrants; children and older people, for example, may be exceptions.

"Our analysis suggests that immigrant health policies should not be 'one size fits all' in type, and that they need to take account of [immigrants'](#) ages and the indicators of the health problems they are vulnerable to", according to Zoua Vang, Professor of Sociology at McGill University and Alain Gagnon, Director of the Demography Department at the University of Montreal. They are joint authors of a research report being presented today in Ottawa at the conference of the Population Change and Lifecourse Network.

The researchers carried out a comprehensive review of 75 empirical studies of this issue. The screening process for immigrants to Canada tends to select candidates in good health, and this means that new immigrants have a significantly better health profile than the general population. However, where this health advantage exists, it tends to diminish over time, so that health indicators for immigrants progressively converge with those of native-born Canadians. But while this so-called "healthy immigrant effect" is usually confirmed for adult immigrants, it is quite another matter for children and older immigrants, as well as for refugees. It also varies depending on the region of origin, and the selection effects are larger the greater the cultural distance

between immigrants' sending country and Canada. The scale of the healthy immigrant selection effect is also much more significant in terms of mortality than of morbidity

With 6.7 million immigrants already in Canada, and a projected increase of 334,000 per year until 2036 (according to Statistics Canada, 2014) the health of immigrants and their descendants could have important repercussions for Canadian [health](#) systems of the future.

More information: Vang, Zoua; Sigouin, Jennifer; Flenon, Astrid; and Gagnon, Alain (2015) "The Healthy Immigrant Effect in Canada: A Systematic Review," Population Change and Lifecourse Strategic Knowledge Cluster Discussion Paper Series/ Un Réseau stratégique de connaissances Changements de population et parcours de vie Document de travail: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 4. Available at : ir.lib.uwo.ca/pclc/vol3/iss1/4

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