



NEWCOMER SETTLEMENT SERVICES

Finding Safety. Building Your Life.

A practical resource guide for
LGBTQ+ refugee claimants in Ontario



Registration for New to Canada settlement services is temporarily unavailable.

Thank you for your interest in The 519's New to Canada settlement services.

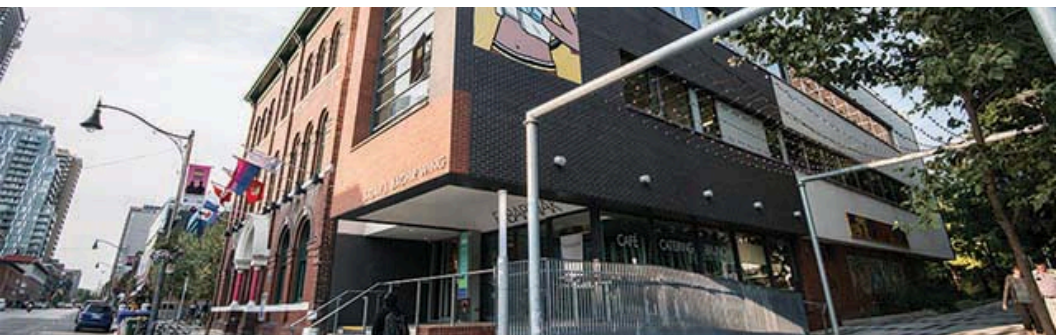
We are currently unable to accept new registrations as we are at service capacity. To ensure we maintain the highest level of support for our current clients who rely on our services, registration for new clients is temporarily closed until further notice.

The 519 remains committed to supporting the LGBTQ+ refugee and newcomer communities and look forward to assisting you when capacity allows.

We appreciate your understanding.

In the meantime, we encourage you to explore the resources provided on our website and in the New to Canada booklet.

The 519 Newcomer Settlement Team



Looking for services or support?

Click [here](#) or scan the QR code to explore a directory of organizations and programs supporting 2SLGBTQ+ refugees and newcomers across Ontario. Contact providers directly to learn about eligibility and availability.



Start Here

You deserve safety, dignity and clear information

This guide is for people who have made, or are preparing to make, a refugee claim in Canada and identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex or another sexually or gender-diverse identity.

IF YOU NEED HELP NOW

Choose the number that matches what is happening:

- ☐ Immediate danger or medical emergency: **call 911.**
- ☐ Thoughts of suicide or a suicide crisis: **call or text 988, 24/7.**
- ☐ Non-emergency mental-health crisis in Toronto: **call 211** and ask for the Toronto Community Crisis Service.
- ☐ Emergency shelter in Toronto: call Central Intake at **416-338-4766 or 1-877-338-3398, 24/7.**

Important

This booklet gives general information, does not constitute not legal advice. Rules and service availability can change. Speak with a qualified refugee lawyer about your case.



First 30-Day Checklist

Some steps are urgent. Do not wait for every other problem to be solved before getting legal advice.

First 48 Hours

- ☐ Read every letter and note each deadline.
- ☐ Contact a refugee lawyer or Legal Aid Ontario.
- ☐ Keep copies of all forms and identity documents.
- ☐ Tell your lawyer exactly how and when you entered Canada.

First 2 Weeks

- ☐ Complete your immigration medical exam within the time given.
- ☐ Confirm that your Basis of Claim form is complete and submitted correctly.
- ☐ Ask about an open work permit and Ontario Works.
- ☐ Connect with The 519 and other community supports.

Ongoing

- ☐ Update IRB, IRCC and CBSA separately when contact information changes.
- ☐ Renew your work permit and refugee identity document before expiry.
- ☐ Collect evidence and arrange translations early.
- ☐ Attend every appointment and hearing.

Keep One Safe File

Store your Acknowledgement of Claim, RPID/RPCD, Basis of Claim, Notice to Appear, work permit, medical papers and all letters from IRB, IRCC and CBSA together. Keep a secure digital backup.

Understand the Process

Your refugee claim at a glance

Every claim is different, but most claims move through the following [stages](#).

1 Make the claim

You provide information to IRCC or CBSA and complete required forms. An officer decides whether the claim is eligible to be referred to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB).

2 Complete the Basis of Claim

The [Basis of Claim \(BOC\)](#) explains who you are, what happened, why you fear return and why Canada should protect you. Inland claimants normally upload it with the online claim. Port-of-entry instructions and deadlines can differ.

3 Referral to the Refugee Protection Division

If the claim is eligible, it is sent to the IRB's Refugee Protection Division (RPD). The RPD, not IRCC or CBSA, decides whether you are a Convention Refugee or person in need of protection.

4 Prepare evidence and attend the hearing

You and your lawyer organize evidence, translations and witnesses. Most hearings are scheduled virtually. Your Notice to Appear gives the date, time and instructions.

5 Receive the decision

If accepted, you become a protected person and may apply for permanent residence. If rejected, get legal advice immediately because appeal and court deadlines may be very short.



New Ineligibility Rules

When a Refugee Claim Is Ineligible

Recent changes to Canada's [refugee eligibility rules](#) mean that some claims may now be found ineligible based on when and how a person entered Canada.

New Eligibility Rules

For refugee claims made **on or after June 3, 2025**, a claim may be ineligible if it is made:

- **More than one year after the person first entered Canada**, for people whose first entry was after June 24, 2020; or
- **More than 14 days after entering Canada between official ports of entry along the Canada–U.S. land border.**

These claims are **not referred to the IRB for a refugee hearing**, but affected individuals may still be eligible for a **Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (PRRA)**. Exceptions may apply, including for unaccompanied minors.

Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (PRRA)

A [Pre-Removal Risk Assessment \(PRRA\)](#) looks at the risk you may face if you are removed from Canada. This may include a risk of:

- Persecution
- Torture
- Risk to your life
- Cruel or unusual treatment or punishment

The PRRA Process

- ☐ **CBSA reviews your case.** If you are facing removal, CBSA determines whether you are eligible for a PRRA.
- ☐ **You are notified if you can apply.** You cannot apply for a PRRA unless CBSA tells you that you are eligible.
- ☐ **Submit your application.** You explain the risks you would face if returned to your country and provide supporting evidence.
- ☐ **IRCC reviews your application.** An immigration officer reviews your application and evidence.
- ☐ **A decision is made.** If accepted: You may become a Protected Person and may be eligible to apply for permanent residence.
- ☐ **If refused:** Removal may proceed. You should speak with a lawyer immediately about any other legal options that may be available.

LGBTQ+ Claims

There is no single way to be LGBTQ+

IRB Chairperson's [Guideline 9](#) guides decision-makers in cases involving Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression, and Sex Characteristics (SOGIESC).

Guideline 9 recognizes

People understand, name, express and disclose their identity in different ways across cultures and over time. Decision-makers should consider personal, cultural, social, economic and legal realities, language barriers, mental well-being and trauma.

What should not be expected of you

- ☐ You do not need to look, dress, speak or behave in a stereotypically gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans or queer way.
- ☐ You are not expected to have known your identity from a young age, to have followed a North American 'coming out' story, or to be open with family and friends.
- ☐ A past heterosexual relationship, marriage or children does not automatically disprove a SOGIESC identity.
- ☐ You are not required to attend LGBTQ+ organizations or events in Canada to establish your identity.
- ☐ You are not expected to submit sexually explicit photographs, videos or other visual material.

Respect and privacy

- ☐ Participants should use your chosen name, terminology and pronouns, including interpreters.
- ☐ RPD and Refugee Appeal Division proceedings are private. Extra confidentiality safeguards may be requested for particularly sensitive information.
- ☐ Tell your lawyer if you fear being outed to family, community members or a co-claimant. Separate claims or other safeguards may sometimes be appropriate.

Hearing Preparation

Prepare to tell your story safely and clearly

Your hearing is your opportunity to answer questions about your claim. [Preparation](#) helps you understand what will happen and reduces avoidable surprises.

Before the hearing

- ☐ Review your Basis of Claim (BOC), narrative, immigration forms and evidence with your lawyer. Do not memorize a script.
- ☐ Read the Notice to Appear carefully. Most hearings are virtual and use Microsoft Teams; arrange a reliable device, internet connection and a private room.
- ☐ Confirm your interpreter's language and dialect. Interpretation at the RPD hearing is provided at no cost.
- ☐ Organize every document you submitted. Ask your lawyer what to have open or printed.
- ☐ Join a free Hearing Ready Tour through My Refugee Claim.

During the hearing

- ☐ Answer honestly and directly. If you do not know or remember, say so. Never guess or make up an answer.
- ☐ If you do not understand a question or interpreter, say so immediately and ask for it to be repeated or explained.
- ☐ You may ask for a break if you feel overwhelmed or need time to regulate.

You can request accommodations

Ask as early as possible if disability, trauma, age, gender-based harm or another personal circumstance makes it harder to participate. Possible accommodations include an in-person hearing, more breaks, a support person, a member or interpreter of a particular gender, alternative scheduling or other changes. Your lawyer can help make the request.

Legal Support

Build your legal team and protect your case

A qualified refugee lawyer can explain the legal test, identify deadlines, correct forms and prepare you for questions.

Finding authorized help

- ☐ [Legal Aid Ontario](#) may pay for BOC preparation, hearing representation and some appeals if you qualify financially and your case has merit.
- ☐ A paid representative must be authorized: a lawyer or permitted paralegal in good standing, or a licensed immigration consultant.
- ☐ No representative can guarantee that your claim will be accepted. Hiring someone does not give your case special treatment.
- ☐ Never sign a blank form. Read what you sign, ask questions and keep a complete copy.

Your BOC and evidence

- ☐ Tell the truth and include important events, dates, people and places. Tell your lawyer quickly if something is wrong or missing.
- ☐ Possible evidence includes identity documents, messages, threats, medical or police records, letters from people who know what happened, and current country information.
- ☐ Documents not in English or French need a translation and translator's declaration. Do not translate evidence yourself without legal advice.
- ☐ Evidence is generally due at least 10 calendar days before the hearing. Follow the current IRB rules and your Notice to Appear; late evidence needs special permission.

Legal Aid Ontario

Call 1-800-668-8258. Toronto Refugee Law Office:
416-977-8111, 20 Dundas Street West, Suite 201.



Legal Resources

The 519 works with and refers community members to lawyers and legal organizations with experience in refugee and immigration matters.

Name	Contact	Email
Aadil Mangalji	416-850-7167	aadil@imlawgroup.com
Adrienne Smith	647-365-1895 647-365-1801	smith@smithimmigrationgroup.com
Alex Verman	365-605-5810	lawyer@alexverman.com
Anisha Nag	416-300-2211	anisha@anishanaglaw.com
Ashley Fisch	647-805-0750	afisch@afalawyers.ca
Battista Migration Law Group	416-203-2899	reception@migrationlawgroup.com
Carlos Vera		carlosvlaw@gmail.com
Christian Julien	416-988-8853	cjulien@kingwelllaw.com
Daniel Radin	416-553-7890	danielradinlaw@gmail.com
El-Farouk Khaki	416-925-7227	info@elfaroukkhaki.ca
Kareem Ibrahim	1-877-618-9861	kareem@kareemibrahimlaw.ca
Lewis and Associates	416-924-2227	hello@lewislegal.ca
Mary Akhbari	416-668-1103	akhbarilawoffice@gmail.com
Rebeka Lauks	647-805-3550	rebeka@laukslaw.com
Zainab Jamal	647-776-7500 ext. 124	zjamal@desloges.ca

Please note

Inclusion on this list does not guarantee availability, eligibility for Legal Aid, or representation. Clients should contact the lawyer or legal organization directly to confirm services, fees, and eligibility.

Documents and Privacy

Know your documents. Keep them current.

Immigration documents have different purposes. Keep the originals secure and carry only what you need.

DOCUMENT	WHY IT MATTERS
Acknowledgement of Claim	Confirms that IRCC or CBSA received your claim; may establish IFHP eligibility while you wait for the RPID.
RPID / former RPCD (Brown Paper)	Confirms that you made a claim and helps prove IFHP eligibility. Expired documents are not valid.
Basis of Claim	Your signed account of who you are, what happened and why you need protection.
Notice to Appear	Gives your hearing date, time, format and instructions.
Work Permit and SIN	Authorize employment and allow payroll reporting. Check both expiry dates.

Three rules that protect your claim

- ☐ Report any change to your address, phone number or email separately to the RPD, IRCC and CBSA. Telling one does not update the others.
- ☐ [Apply online](#) to replace an RPID/RPCD that is expired, expiring within three months, lost, stolen, damaged or incorrect.
- ☐ Use strong passwords and two-factor authentication. Do not post your UCI, file numbers, identity documents or hearing link on social media.

Missing a notice can be serious

If the RPD cannot reach you and you miss your hearing, your claim may be sent to an abandonment hearing. An abandoned claim will not be decided on its merits and you may be required to leave Canada.

Health and Well-Being

Accessing health care while your claim is pending

Most refugee claimants receive temporary coverage through the [Interim Federal Health Program \(IFHP\)](#), not OHIP.

IFHP Coverage

Basic health benefits include medically necessary doctor and hospital care. IFHP also covers one immigration medical exam and related diagnostic tests. Use a provider registered with IFHP and show your Acknowledgement of Claim or RPID/RPCD.

Costs that changed on May 1, 2026

- ☐ Basic doctor and hospital care remains fully covered with no [co-payment](#).
- ☐ You pay \$4 for each eligible prescription filled or refilled.
- ☐ You pay 30% of the IFHP-covered cost for other eligible supplemental benefits, including urgent dental care, vision care, counselling and assistive devices.
- ☐ Ask the [provider](#) what you will pay before treatment and request a receipt.

Getting help

- ☐ IFHP / Medavie Blue Cross questions: **1-888-614-1880**.
- ☐ Health advice from an Ontario registered nurse: **call 811**, 24/7.
- ☐ Non-emergency mental-health crisis in Toronto: **call 211** and ask for the Toronto Community Crisis Service.
- ☐ Suicide crisis: **call or text 988**. Immediate danger: **call 911**.

After a Positive Decision

Convention refugees and other protected persons are eligible for OHIP. Apply through ServiceOntario and bring the required immigration, identity and Ontario residency documents.

Work and Money

Build stability one step at a time

A refugee claim does not automatically give permission to work. You need a valid work permit and Social Insurance Number (SIN).

Work permit and SIN

- ☐ An [open work permit](#) may be issued after your claim is found eligible for referral and you pass the immigration medical examination.
- ☐ When requested with an eligible claim, there is no separate application or additional fee. Family members included in the claim may also qualify.
- ☐ After receiving the permit, apply for a SIN online, by mail or at Service Canada. A temporary SIN normally begins with 9 and has an expiry date.
- ☐ Apply to extend your work permit before it expires. Keep the expired permit and proof of a timely extension application to show an employer while waiting.

Income supports and everyday finances

- ☐ Refugee claimants with official claim documents can apply for [Ontario Works](#). Approval depends on residency, income, assets, family circumstances and financial need. Toronto applications: **1-888-999-1142**.
- ☐ You have the right to [open a bank account](#) even without a job or an immediate deposit, if the bank can confirm your identity using acceptable documents.
- ☐ [Canada's tax system](#) is based on tax residency, not immigration status. Filing every year, even with little or no income, may be required to receive benefits and credits for which you qualify.
- ☐ Keep pay stubs, T4 slips, rent receipts and benefit letters. Ask a free community tax clinic for help.

Your Human Rights

[Ontario's Human Rights Code](#) protects against discrimination in employment and services based on grounds that include sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, race, place of origin and citizenship.

Housing and Safety

Finding a safe place to stay

Housing in Toronto can be difficult to find. Ask for support early, especially if you may lose your current housing.

Emergency Shelter in Toronto

Call Central Intake at **416-338-4766** or **call 311**. The service operates 24/7 and refers people to available emergency shelter and other overnight accommodation. A referral does not guarantee that an appropriate bed is immediately available.

LGBTQ+ newcomer housing support

- ☐ The 519 and Homes First operate [Pacewood](#), a shelter for LGBTQ+ adults who arrived through a refugee pathway. It prioritizes trans, gender-diverse and non-binary people.
- ☐ Beds are very limited and there is no waitlist. Call The 519 at **416-392-6874**; you will receive a call back only if a bed is available.
- ☐ **Call 211** for housing help, food, health, legal and other community referrals anywhere in Ontario. Service is available 24/7 in more than 150 languages.

Know your rights and reduce housing scams

- ☐ A landlord cannot discriminate because of sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, race, place of origin, citizenship or receipt of public assistance.
- ☐ Get the rental agreement in writing. Keep receipts, messages and a copy of every document you sign.
- ☐ Be cautious if someone demands cash immediately, refuses to show the unit or lease, or asks to keep your passport or immigration documents.
- ☐ For housing legal information in Toronto, call the Federation of Metro Tenants' Associations at **416-921-9494** or Legal Aid Ontario at **1-800-668-8258**.

Discrimination Support

[Human Rights Legal Support Centre](#): **416-597-4900** or **1-866-625-5179**.

Education and Community

You do not have to navigate this alone

Connection to affirming community can reduce isolation and help you find reliable information.

Children and education

- ☐ Minor children who are refugee claimants, or whose parents are refugee claimants, do not need a study permit for preschool, elementary or secondary school.
- ☐ Contact your local school board about registration, proof of age and address, language support and immunization records.
- ☐ Adults usually need a [study permit](#) for programs longer than six months. Speak with a school and qualified legal adviser before enrolling.

Settlement and community support

- ☐ Most federally funded settlement services are not available while a claim is pending, but Ontario, municipal and community programs may still help. Ask the provider about eligibility.
- ☐ The 519's New to Canada program supports LGBTQ+ refugees and newcomers with settlement information, referrals, community programs and hearing preparation resources.
- ☐ Among Friends is a bi-weekly information program for registered LGBTQ+ asylum seekers and refugee claimants.
- ☐ **Call or text 211** to find services in your municipality and preferred language.

Your Human Rights

Ontario's Human Rights Code protects against discrimination in employment and services based on grounds that include sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, race, place of origin and citizenship.

After the Hearing

Understand the decision and act quickly

The next step depends on whether your claim is accepted, rejected, withdrawn or declared abandoned.

If your claim is accepted

You become a protected person and can remain in Canada. You may apply for [permanent residence](#), but permanent residence is not automatic. Apply for OHIP and get advice about including eligible family members in your permanent residence application.

If your claim is rejected

Contact your lawyer immediately. Depending on your case, options may include an appeal to the Refugee Appeal Division, an application to the Federal Court or another process. Deadlines can be very short and not everyone has the same options.

If withdrawal or abandonment is being discussed

Get independent legal advice before agreeing. Withdrawal and abandonment can bring your claim to an end, activate a removal order and affect IFHP coverage and future options.

Travel and return to the country of persecution

- ☐ Returning to the country where you say you face persecution can put a pending claim at risk and may also threaten protected person status after a positive decision.
- ☐ Get individualized legal advice before travelling outside Canada or taking steps involving authorities from your country of persecution.

Keep building your life

- ☐ A positive refugee decision is a major legal step, but housing, employment, health and financial stability may still take time. Continue using community supports.

Notes

Key official and community sources

Information was checked on September 1, 2026. Use the linked pages for updates and full eligibility rules.

Refugee claim and legal process

- [IRCC – Claiming asylum from within Canada](#)
- [IRCC – Information for Refugee Claimants](#)
- [IRB – Claimant’s Guide and claim steps](#)
- [IRB – Guideline 9: SOGIESC proceedings](#)
- [IRB – Guideline 8: accessibility and accommodations](#)
- [Legal Aid Ontario – Services for refugee claimants](#)
- [My Refugee Claim – preparation guide and Ready Tours](#)

Health, work and financial stability

- [IRCC – Work, study and supports while waiting](#)
- [IRCC – Interim Federal Health Program](#)
- [IRCC – IFHP co-payments starting May 1, 2026](#)
- [Ontario – OHIP eligibility](#)
- [Ontario – Ontario Works eligibility](#)
- [Canada – Opening a bank account](#)
- [CRA – Newcomers to Canada and taxes](#)
- [Ontario Human Rights Commission – Human Rights Code](#)

Toronto and community supports

- [The 519 – New to Canada](#)
- [The 519 – LGBTQ+ newcomer housing services](#)
- [City of Toronto – Central Intake](#)
- [City of Toronto – Toronto Community Crisis Service](#)
- [211 Ontario – Refugee resources](#)
- [9-8-8 Suicide Crisis Helpline](#)
- [Human Rights Legal Support Centre](#)

Quality and Legal Review

This guide summarizes public information. Before formal publication, The 519 should complete its usual program, legal, communications and accessibility review and confirm all local contacts and program schedules.

The 519: Programs and Services



Programs and Services

The 519 is committed to the health, happiness, and full participation of 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

Located in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village, The 519 offers community programs, services, supports, education, and opportunities to connect for 2SLGBTQ+ people and communities in Toronto and beyond.

- **Newcomer and Refugee Support** – Settlement support, refugee information, legal referrals, community connection, employment support, and programs including Among Friends and Project Unlock.
- **Financial Programs** – Financial education, budgeting support, one-on-one coaching, benefits navigation, and tax support.
- **Community Drop-Ins** – Low-barrier programs offering meals, social connection, practical support, information, and referrals, including Sunday Drop-In and Meal Trans.
- **Children, Youth and Families** – Programs for children, youth, parents, caregivers, and 2SLGBTQ+ families, including EarlyON, KAAS, YAAS, and TYMP.
- **Older Adults** – Social, recreational, educational, and community-building programs for older 2SLGBTQ+ adults.
- **Legal and Health Supports** – Legal information, refugee hearing support, trans ID assistance, health services, harm reduction, and wellness programming.
- **Arts, Recreation & Community** – arts and cultural programming, community groups, events, workshops and volunteer and leadership opportunities
- **Education & Training** – Training and education for workplaces, organizations, service providers, and community groups on creating more inclusive environments for 2SLGBTQ+ people.

Learn more about The 519 programs

For current program schedules, registration information, and eligibility, visit the519.org/programs.

Program availability and schedules may change. Please contact The 519 or visit the website for the most current information.



Settlement and Integration Services



My Refugee Claim

Your journey through Canada's refugee protection process will be your very own. But there are important steps that all refugee claimants must take. Use the eight sections of **myrefugeeclaim.ca** to find where you are at in the process, learn what you must do, and prepare for what is next.

The multilingual Refugee Hearing Preparation (RHP) Guide remains useful to educate, guide, and support refugee claimants who are preparing for their refugee hearings.

Choose your language.

[English / Anglais](#)
[አማርኛ / Amharic](#)
[Español / Spanish / Espagnol](#)
[हिन्दी / Hindi](#)
[Lingála / Lingala](#)
[Kiswahili / Swahili](#)
[اردو / Urdu / Ourdu](#)

[Français / French](#)
[العربية / Arabic / Arabe](#)
[فارسی / Farsi / Perse](#)
[Kreyòl / Creole / Créole](#)
[ਪੰਜਾਬੀ / Punjabi / Panjabi](#)
[Türkçe / Turkish / Turc](#)

My Refugee Claim offers two additional resources – the [Orientation Booklet](#), and [Ready Tours](#) – to help you get informed, connected, and prepared throughout your refugee claim journey.

Important

Some of the information, particularly about processes, has now changed. These changes are not reflected in the RHP Guide. Up-to-date and expanded information is available at [My Refugee Claim](#).



Have a legal question?

Visit [Steps to Justice](#) for free, easy-to-understand information about legal problems in Ontario. Click the link or scan the QR code to explore your rights, options and next steps.



Meet the Three Government Agencies

There are three government agencies that work with refugees. Each agency has different roles and responsibilities:

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC)

IRCC manages Canada's immigration and refugee programs. For refugee claimants, IRCC processes refugee claims made inside Canada, issues immigration documents and work permits, and processes permanent residence applications for people who become Protected Persons.

Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA)

CBSA manages Canada's borders and immigration enforcement. For refugee claimants, CBSA receives refugee claims made at ports of entry, conducts identity and security checks, determines whether some claims are eligible to be referred, and handles removals and enforcement when required.

Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (IRB)

The IRB is an independent administrative tribunal that makes decisions on refugee and immigration matters. Its Refugee Protection Division (RPD) reviews evidence and testimony and decides whether a person is a Convention refugee or a person in need of protection.

The IRB also has a Refugee Appeal Division (RAD) that considers eligible appeals of RPD decisions.



Personal planning

My next steps

Do not write passwords, full immigration file numbers or other sensitive information in a booklet that could be lost.

Date	Action	Who Can Help	Done
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐
			☐

Notes and questions for my lawyer or settlement worker

New to Canada
Support for Refugees and Newcomers
NewToCanada@The519.org
437-253-7112

THE 519
519 Church St, Toronto, ON M4Y 2C9
A City of Toronto Agency
Registered charity (119310761-RR0001)