

Thank You!

Your Gift at Work

The Refugee Health and Wellbeing Project



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a new world standard of health

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Your Gift and The Refugee Health and Wellbeing Project

Your support is making a difference and your commitment to advancing health in our community is appreciated. The Calgary Refugee Health and Wellbeing Project is helping to ease the burden and hardship often associated with refugee settlement.

We are pleased to provide you with this update on the progress of the Project.

Background Refugee Health and Wellbeing Project

The United High Commission for Refugees defines a refugee as “any person who is outside his/her country of nationality or habitual residence; has a well-founded fear of persecution because of his/her race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion; and is unable or unwilling to avail himself/herself to the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.”

Refugees arriving in Canada experience multiple challenges which negatively affect virtually all social determinants of health, reducing their overall wellbeing and ability to integrate effectively into Canadian life. They are widely recognized as among the most marginalized members of society, with poorer health, greater health needs, and more significant access barriers than immigrants and Canadian-born citizens.

Despite their health care needs, refugees typically do not seek medical or health services until they are seriously ill, leading to an overuse of costly emergency and acute-care services. These new members of our community need assistance to understand how the health system can help them to live healthy lives in their adopted country.

Many refugees suffer from psychological distress. Culture shock, adjustment challenges, and often, post traumatic stress disorders, survivor guilt and retraumatization make mental health the most pronounced need for this population.

In addition, foreign academic qualifications and work experience are often not recognized by Canadian employers, limiting

employment opportunities. This may reduce access to affordable housing, erode self esteem and increase social isolation.

In 2007, the Alberta Health Services-Calgary Health Region, Health Diverse Populations, and the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS)-Calgary Refugee Health Program (CHRP) began an initiative to improve health and wellbeing of refugees.

Did You Know?

More than 50% of refugees speak little or no English.

Adding Value to Existing Services

The Refugee Health and Wellbeing Project is working in partnership with the Calgary Refugee Health Program (CRHP) at the Margaret Chisholm Resettlement Centre (MCRC) under the auspices of the Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS) to address the needs of individuals, as well as the overall refugee population, by becoming well equipped to provide appropriate information and tools to help the refugee community access health services.

Every year about 1200 refugees come to Calgary. Some are government-assisted refugees received through the CCIS, who are provided with temporary accommodation and assistance in overcoming initial obstacles. Others are migrants to Calgary from original destinations in Canada, who receive limited resettlement assistance. Half the refugees are sponsored by the community or are refugee claimants/asylum seekers.

Did You Know?

Refugees carry additional burdens as a result of their past and ongoing life experiences.

Achievements to Date

A Refugee Health Project Coordinator was hired in September 2007. The coordinator has taken the lead role in facilitating and strengthening collaborative partnerships in the health and community sectors to collectively identify how to increase capacity. A research paper on promising practices, programs and approaches for improving the health of refugees has been completed. Outcomes will be shared to inform interviews with key stakeholders and to guide future project plans.

Consultations took place with key informants between April and July 2008, to begin development of a “made-in-Calgary” strategy to improve the health and wellbeing of the refugee population. These interviews were well received and provided valuable information.

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“ We have to fully embrace all diverse populations and create a culture of responsibility because we all have rights ... but this will take a commitment by everyone.”

“ The community has to have a voice and be on top of the decision-making structure and the leaders should be guiding us.”

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Participant in prenatal refugee women's group.

Did You Know?

As many as 69% of adult refugees have been subjected to torture, war, abuse, extreme prejudice and other forms of deprivation prior to arriving in Canada.

Many activities have taken place, including:

- Ongoing Learning and Development Refugee Health courses are being offered to health care providers. By the end of December three courses will have been completed, including information on defining what is a refugee, eligibility for health benefits, resources in the community, health concerns, panel discussion among refugees, refugee mental health and communication across language and cultural differences. Ongoing panel presentations have also been provided to staff at the Sheldon Chumir Centre.
- The 3 Cheers Immigration and Refugee Health Promotion Project has been established, focusing on developing and strengthening partnerships between Alberta Health Services and immigrant-serving organizations, to implement health promotion initiatives by developing a post partum group for refugee women and their families.
- The community liaison is working on connecting with refugee communities and organizations, identifying needs of refugees and service providers. Meetings have been held with 22 organizations/groups. Work also continues on the development of the health services DVD.
- Two well-known experts in trans-cultural mental health service delivery in Canada have presented and delivered an interactive two

and a half day workshop, attended by approximately 30 participants from Calgary, Edmonton and Brooks.

- Ongoing consultations are provided to health care providers to support work with the refugee population.
- Committee work within Alberta Health Services continues with both the Project Coordinator and the Community Liaison to ensure a diversity perspective.
- A Master of Social Work practicum student has been assisting with exploration of the role and dimensions of a case manager at CRHP, based on the many complex needs of this population. The role would function as a liaison with CRHP staff and other resettlement staff.

Next Steps

The Project will be developing and implementing plans around decreasing language and cultural barriers to care, expanding refugee health services and providing community-based programming and initiatives, while continuing to improve interpretation and translation services for refugee patients.

Evaluation

Evaluation of this initiative will include analysing data from health care professionals, refugees, immigrant-serving organizations and community partners. The Calgary Refugee Health Program

has a well-established electronic health record system which will provide data on the project's impact on health outcomes.

It is important that refugees be given a voice so that we can begin to learn the reality of their experiences and the impact that this initiative has had on their ability to integrate.

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Thank You!