Promoting Access and Equity in Vaccine Participation Among Refugee and LEP Populations in Arizona

April 5th, 2021
Definition of a Refugee

“Owing to a well-founded **fear of being persecuted** for reasons of

- Race
- Religion
- Nationality
- Membership of a particular social group
- Political opinion

is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”

UNHCR, Article 1, The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees
*Refugee: Outside his or her country of nationality and unable to avail themselves of the protection of the county in which they reside. Refugee status is granted by UNHCR or US Embassy.

*Asylee: Granted asylum on the same grounds as refugees, but do so in the United States.

Asylum-seeker: Someone who is seeking international protection but whose claim for refugee status has not yet been determined

Undocumented Individual: Entered the United States without permission, or stayed here beyond the expiration date of visa or other permitted stay.

*Eligible for ORR and other federal and state benefits & have a pathway to citizenship.

Asylum-seekers and undocumented individuals are eligible for Federal Emergency Services Program
Less than 1% of these refugees are ever resettled in a third country.
Refugee Overview

The Refugee Journey

Flee country of origin to a relatively safe neighboring country or refugee camp.

Approved families then travel to the United States and are greeted by the local RST office. In the United States they will find a job, learn English, and integrate into the local community.

Referrals are approved for resettlement. Refugees receive cultural orientation and language training based on their resettlement location.

Applications are approved or denied and refugee families must complete medical examinations.

Wait for application to be processed and for referrals to be submitted. The average wait time is 7 years.

Refugee families undergo RSC Interviews/USCIS Interviews to demonstrate the applicant qualifies as a refugee. Extensive background checks are conducted.
Refugee Resettlement Agencies in MC:

Catholic Charities Community Services

The International Rescue Committee

Lutheran Social Services of the Southwest

Arizona Immigrant & Refugee Services

Resettlement Agency: An organization that has a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of State to provide Reception and Placement services to newly arrived refugees.
Apartment Rental
Basic Furnishing
Initial Food
Basic Clothing
English Language Classes
Health Follow Up
Cultural Orientation Classes
Benefits Enrollment
Job Placement
School Enrollment

Services Offered 90 Days after Arrival
Arriving Populations in AZ in the last 5 years

- 66 unique countries
- 20 languages
- Top languages: Arabic, Spanish, Swahili, Somali, Kinyarwanda, Dari, Kiswahili, Farsi, Burmese, Tigrinya.
- 1% reported English as second language
General Health Considerations

- Lack of screenings, access to ongoing healthcare and culture of preventative healthcare in country of origin
- Vulnerability during journey fleeing
- Lack of access to medical records
- Language needs (1% of refugees speak English on arrival)
- Cultural accommodations (Same-gender provider, traditional medicine, etc.)
- Health literacy (Provider will need extra time explaining health concepts)
- Potentially coordinating with their RA Case Manager
Refugees and COVID-19

- The inability to self-isolate/socially distance within large, multi-generational households amidst cramped housing conditions
- Frequent visiting among families across different households
- Delays in testing due to language/communication barriers and literacy challenges, and not seeking care unless sick
- Lack of access to information about COVID-19 risks and public health directives in their language
- Many refugees work for the same employer and are reluctant to disclose COVID-19 symptoms for fear of losing their job given financial concerns.
- Obligations to take care of elderly parents and not leaving them unattended due to COVID-19
- Privacy, confidentiality and stigmatization concerns
Barriers to the COVID-19 Vaccine

Vaccine Journey

1. Choice
   + Social influences
   + Cultural values
   + Religious beliefs
   + Understanding facts
   + Overcoming myths
   + Understanding access

2. Access
   + Documentation
   + Clinic location
   + Transportation
   + Childcare
   + Time off work
   + Language
   + Technology

3. Experience
   - Clinic accommodations
   - Culturally aware staff
   - Vaccine dose
   - Side effects
   - Overall impression

Second dose
How Can We Help Overcome Barriers?

• Provide accessible information
Multilingual Fact Sheets

- Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna, J&J
  Translated factsheets for recipients and caregivers
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- CDC Facts about COVID-19
  Vaccines in 24 languages
National Resource Center for Refugees, Immigrants, and Migrants (NRC-RIM)

- [https://nrcrim.org/](https://nrcrim.org/)
- Funded by the CDC to support state and local health departments working with refugee, immigrant, and migrant communities that have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19.
- Translated Materials Library
- Videos
How Can We Help Overcome Barriers?

• Provide accessible information
• Know what is going on in the state to increase accessibility of the COVID-19 vaccine for refugees
State and Local Initiatives

- Maricopa County Department of Public Health has a **COVID-19 Refugee Outreach Team**. The team includes four CHNs, all previously resettled as refugees. Collectively, the CHNs speak Arabic, French, Karen, Thai, Burmese, Swahili, Kinyarwanda, Kinyamulenge, and Kirundi. For presentations or information on case investigations, contact tracing, and community outreach, please contact them at [RefugeeOutreach@maricopa.gov](mailto:RefugeeOutreach@maricopa.gov)

- Pima County Department of Public Health is partnering with International Rescue Committee in Tucson to put on targeted vaccine events with onsite registration in areas where refugees live, work, and play. For more information about this initiative, reach out to [Riley.McMahon@rescue.org](mailto:Riley.McMahon@rescue.org)

- Biweekly Refugee Health in Arizona email with current AZ COVID-19 resources / best practices / information for refugee services providers. jdavis@azdes.gov
How Can We Help Overcome Barriers?

• Provide accessible information
• Know what is going on in the state to increase accessibility of the COVID-19 vaccine for refugees
• Understand vaccine hesitancy
Vaccination Hesitancy

• Mistrust in Mainstream Medicine
  • Leave appointments without Rx / answers
  • Lack of interpretation / understanding of services provided and what follow up is expected
  • Lack of following through with referrals
  • Medical mistakes due to misinterpretation
  • Denial of interpretation

• Vaccines
  • Untrustworthy sources of information
  • Low health literacy
  • Lack of access to health information
  • Historic events – Transition to Davida Carr