



Doctors for Change 2019 Policy Priorities

Improve Immigrant and Refugee Health

ABOUT DOCTORS FOR CHANGE

Doctors for Change is a member-based organization with over 1,500 participating health care providers, students, and medical residents throughout the Houston region. Our members, Board of Directors, and Leadership Team donate countless hours to make our organization run. The Board and Leadership team work closely with committees and our staff members to accomplish all of the work that we do. Doctors for Change works to increase access to care and improve the health of all Houstonians and all Texans through research, education, collaboration, and advocacy.

WHY IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE HEALTH

Immigrant and refugee populations face numerous barriers to receiving health care services which can lead to negative health outcomes not only in their specific populations, but also decreased overall health in their greater communities and wasteful economic spending in both state and county settings.

In Texas, undocumented immigrants receive primary care via either safety net hospital systems or any of the sixty-nine federally qualified health centers in the state. Due to lack of adequate sources of care, most of these patients do not receive regular care, and when they begin to present with advanced stages of a disease, they tend to utilize emergency care services. The lack of an adequate health care structure for these vulnerable populations contributes to a cycle of wasteful healthcare spending and poor health management. Other barriers this population faces include language difficulties, fear of deportation leading to fear of seeking medical care, and odd work schedules that prevent them from seeking medical care. As of 2016, 4.1 million native-born Americans residing in Texas had at least one immigrant parent – and these children frequently face many of the same barriers to accessing health care as their parents.

Amongst refugees, acculturation (i.e. the stresses of adjusting to life in a new country), is one of the chief barriers to accessing healthcare services. Isolation, stress, and strong cultural beliefs about health care practices play a role in delayed care in this population. Additional barriers to access to care in the refugee population involve inadequate transportation, lack of childcare services, time cost, financial cost, and scheduling difficulties.

Asylees also face several barriers to healthcare primarily because past trauma and conflict can lead to hesitancy in seeking care. Added to that, difficulties with navigating the American healthcare system can make these individuals less likely to seek care.



DFC strongly believes that Texas needs to address these barriers and optimize immigrant and refugee health outcomes.

WE THEREFORE RECOMMEND

- Designate hospitals and clinics as safe spaces.
- Ensure that all hospitals and emergency rooms have access to medical translation services.
- Address the healthcare worker shortage through an expedited process for credentialing individuals who completed medical training abroad.