



# Health and Wellness in African Immigrant Community

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Congratulations on your interest in promoting the health and well-being of refugee groups in your community. Often, health is a challenge refugees face in leaving their original countries and settling in new communities. It is the reason why the Office of Refugee Resettlement, in collaboration with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services' Refugee Mental Health Program, and the Office of Global Health Affairs, has launched *POINTS OF WELLNESS—Partnering for Refugee Health and Well-Being*. The goal of this initiative is to improve the long-term health of refugees in the United States.

This toolkit, *Refugee Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Toolkit*, is a key part of the *POINTS OF WELLNESS* initiative. It shows community organizations how to find partners and resources and how to plan and carry out health promotion activities so that refugees have the opportunity to feel strong, active, wise, and worthwhile.

In this toolkit, you will find

- A **Manual**. The manual will help you plan and conduct health promotion and disease prevention activities that are culturally appropriate. It also provides information on health concerns that might affect refugees.
- A **Training Guide and PowerPoint Slides**. These materials are to assist you in effectively sharing the ideas in the manual with others.
- An **Article on Health Promotion and Disease Prevention**. The review article provides a good orientation to the field and activities of health promotion and disease prevention.
- A **Video**. The video provides an introduction to promoting health among refugees and can be shared in your community.
- A **Compact Disk (CD)**. The CD contains an electronic version of the manual and PowerPoint slides.

This toolkit comprises many parts. We recommend that you start by looking through the manual. It provides steps and information on planning and carrying out health promotion activities. You will see that it offers guidance on how to begin health promotion activities in your community and how to find the resources to carry them out. It also provides information on how health promotion activities can be tailored to fit the needs of refugee groups in your community. The review article in this toolkit will give additional background information if you have questions about the area of health promotion and disease prevention.

After you have reviewed the manual and its content, you may want to take a look at the video that is part of this toolkit. The video provides an overview of the challenges and possibilities for promoting health among refugee groups. You can show the video alone or use it with the training guide and PowerPoint slides to encourage others to help improve the health of refugees in your community.

We hope that in receiving this toolkit, you see it as an important tool for assisting refugee communities. Your organization's contributions can make a difference in improving the overall well-being of refugees in the United States.

## Introduction

Since you are reviewing this toolkit, prepared by the Office of Refugee Resettlement, in collaboration with the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, Center for Mental Health Services' Refugee Mental Health Program, and the Office of Global Health Affairs, you most likely are interested in and concerned about the health and well-being of refugees in your community. However, you may not be sure which health issue is of greatest concern or how your organization can make a difference. This toolkit can help. It can be a general guide to help you conduct health promotion and disease prevention activities in your community.

### What Does It Mean to Promote Health?

Some people think of health simply as the absence of any disease or illness in a person. It is very important to help prevent diseases and illnesses among people. But promoting health requires more than preventing diseases and illnesses. Health is about having balance, both personally and socially. It is a state of well-being for all the points of wellness—physical, mental, and social. In promoting health and preventing diseases, we want to make sure that people are free of diseases or illnesses, but also that they have all the opportunities to feel strong, active, wise, and worthwhile.

### Why Is There a Need to Promote Health Among Refugee Groups?

Refugee groups form a special health population in the United States. Refugees are people who have been forced to leave their home country. They are unable or unwilling to return to that country because of persecution based on their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. Refugees face many challenges to their health and well-being in having to leave their home and in coming to live in a new country.

While waiting to migrate, refugees often are exposed to infectious and parasitic diseases as well as to physical and psychic trauma. During migration, they also can encounter malnutrition and exposure to the elements, along with continued physical and psychic trauma. Once in the United States, refugees may face such problems as racism, unemployment, and crime when resettling into their communities. They also are at increased susceptibility to such chronic diseases as obesity, heart disease, or diabetes. When you are promoting health and preventing diseases in your community, it is important to think about the immediate health challenges that confront refugees and their overall well-being.

### What Is the Purpose of This Toolkit?

The purpose of this toolkit is to help community organizations engage in activities to promote health and prevent diseases among refugee populations. It offers practical information and guidance so that you can work toward improving the quality of life and toward reducing health disparities for refugees in your community.

## Who Should Use This Toolkit?

This toolkit is designed for community organizations. In the broadest sense, this group includes any individuals who are concerned about refugee health and who are willing to work with others to solve basic issues affecting the health of refugees in their community.

Appropriate organizations may include churches or other faith-based groups, mutual assistance associations (MAAs), and nonprofit organizations interested in assisting refugee members in their community. Other organizations might consist of people who share a similar ethnic or cultural background and who want to lend a hand. Often, such groups have cultural knowledge and skills, including languages, which are critical to providing assistance. In some cases, a new organization may come from among the refugee community's leaders, with their own members seeking ways to address common problems.

Community organizations are uniquely positioned to play an important role in improving personal health in refugee communities, because they often are more equipped to know the local resources available to help. Whether your organization is from outside the refugee community or at the heart of it, the potential exists to make a difference in the health and lives of others.

## How Is the Toolkit Organized?

### A. Manual

This manual is designed to be used by organizations to develop programs and activities in communities that can promote health and prevent diseases effectively, either through changing people's behaviors or by providing greater access to the health resources in a community.

The manual is divided into three parts:

- **Part One: Developing and Implementing Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Activities for Refugee Communities** provides practical guidance for ways your organization can undertake activities to promote health in refugee communities.
- **Part Two: Cultural Sensitivity in Health Promotion Work** addresses the importance of culture in working with and supporting refugee communities and shows ways to ensure that your organization's efforts are culturally appropriate for the refugee groups of interest.
- **Part Three: Resources for Promoting Health in Refugee Communities** serves as an easy reference for information on potential programs, on how to navigate the U.S. health care system, on various screening activities, and on health topics important to refugees. This part of the manual can be used directly to inform members of the refugee community.

## B. Training Resources

Along with the manual, you will find a training guide for the manual, various presentation materials, a health promotion article, a video, and a CD containing an electronic version of the manual and PowerPoint slides. These are designed to help your organization effectively share the information in the manual with its members and the community.

### How Do You Use the Toolkit?

Because different types of organizations might be interested in using the manual, it is organized to function in two ways:

- **Reference tool.** For some organizations, the toolkit can be used as a reference tool, providing information on issues affecting the health of refugee groups and on methods and skills that can benefit organizations already engaged in health promotion work. Various print and Internet resources, which may be used to obtain additional details on a given subject, are also included.
- **Program development guide.** Other organizations may need more guidance in starting health promotion activities. For such groups, the toolkit can provide guidance on the program development process from beginning to end.

We hope the information provided in the toolkit will encourage and assist you with your efforts to promote health and prevent disease among the members of your community.