

## 1.16 Health Literacy Significance for Special Populations: Migrant Workers

Refugees often enter the U.S. without having had consistent or sufficient health care for an extended time. The circumstances of their flight from their country of origin may have contributed to malnutrition, compromised immune systems, parasitic infections, and other communicable diseases. Additionally, many refugees may have experienced emotional trauma prior to or during their flight or in refugee camps and detention centers; they may be dealing with mental and physical aspects of post-traumatic stress.

### Health Examinations During the Resettlement Process

All refugees to the U.S. have an overseas physical examination in a refugee camp and a domestic health assessment when they arrive in the U.S.

- **Overseas Physical Examination:** This screens for “inadmissible” conditions such as tuberculosis, sexually transmitted infections, drug addiction, and physical or mental disorders with related harmful behaviors. Refugees found to have inadmissible conditions must be treated for these before they are allowed to come to the U.S.
- **Domestic Health Assessment:** This is typically conducted by state health departments or refugee services. The assessment differs between states but typically follows up on previously treated inadmissible conditions and looks for parasitic infections, hepatitis B, and growth abnormalities. The assessment may also screen for issues with blood, oral health, vital signs, vision, and urine chemistry. Refugees also receive some health education and orientation to the U.S. health care system in connection with their domestic health assessment.

### Health Care Coverage for Refugees

Health care benefits for the newly arrived can take different forms.

- **Refugee families with children under 18** receive **Medicaid** along with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).



- **Refugees without underaged children** receive Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) and **Refugee Medical Assistance (RMA)** for their first eight months in the U.S. After eight months are up, these refugees are considered the same as any other residents of their state in regard to eligibility for medical coverage assistance programs available to low-income residents.

In general, the period of refugee benefits can be considered quite brief considering all that refugees must go through in the way of learning English, resettling, acculturating, and addressing any emotional issues relating to their flight. Any education in support of a smooth transition to new health coverage and maintaining health care as their benefits terminate is likely to be very helpful.

### **Possible Topics for Health Literacy Education**

- Any topic that develops needed ESOL health literacy skill areas as described in [item 1.1](#) in this toolkit
- Resources for managing stresses of acculturation and resettlement
- How to find health care and coverage after refugee health benefits expire

## Resources

### **[Refugee Health Technical Assistance Center](#)**

An excellent resource to check first, this site provides comprehensive information for health care providers and other refugee service providers on refugee physical and mental health, health-related benefits, and access to care.

### **[U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants: Healthy Living Toolkit](#)**

Designed for recently arrived refugees, this toolkit consists of printable brochures with information on communicable diseases, using health care, domestic violence, mental health care, maternal and child health, and other topics. Materials are available in English and many other languages.

### **[Refugee Health Information Network](#)**

This site provides multilingual health information for refugees and cultural information for health care providers.

### **[U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement: Health Care Reform for Refugees](#)**

This fact sheet provides detailed information on what is new for refugees under health care reform and includes helpful information for refugees seeking care options after their eight months of medical coverage assistance expire.

### **[Virginia Office of Newcomer Services](#)**

This office oversees refugee resettlement in Virginia.

### **[Refugee and Immigrant Services in Virginia](#)**

This site lists contact information for organizations that provide support services and health assessments to refugees in Virginia.

