

The Refugee Health Initiative (RHI): Reciprocal Partnerships Connect Refugee Families with Medical Student Systems Navigators

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Our work is conducted on the unceded traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and səliłwətał (Tseil-Waututh) Nations.

Background

- A “refugee” is a person in need of protection who can apply to immigrate to Canada with private or government sponsorship.¹
- Between January 2015 and July 2022, **203,125 refugees settled in Canada**, and **17,605 refugees settled in British Columbia** (9,065 government sponsored, 7,290 privately sponsored, and 1,255 blended pathway).²
- **Refugees experience unique health challenges** including language and cultural barriers, loss of economic and social status, and disrupted continuity of care.³
- **RHI was created in 2016** in response to Canada welcoming Syrian refugees fleeing civil war, and has expanded to support refugees from many backgrounds (Figure 1).

Poster Type: Program Description



Objective: Help refugee families settle in their new communities while teaching medical students about refugee family’s experiences resettling in Canada.

References

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Program Structure



Figure 2. RHI Structure. RHI engages community partners, refugee families, community translators, and medical students in our mentorship program, community outreach, and research.

Reciprocal Mentorship

- 1-2 medical students are longitudinally paired with a resettled refugee family and complete 1-2 home/virtual visits per month for two years.
- Pairs navigate the health and housing systems, work with interpreters, and develop cultural competencies.
- In the 2021-2022 academic year, 18 refugee families (80 individuals including 42 children <18 years) were each connected with a student and an interpreter.

Community Outreach

- After community partners identify priority topics, we create and present workshops to address the identify knowledge gap.
- In the 2021-2022 academic year, 5 context-specific health presentations were shared with 5 language groups.



Figure 3. Example Presentation. Our mental health presentation is frequently requested by community partners.

Research and Innovation

- Respond to community need by distributing PPE
- Research publications relating to resiliency.⁴

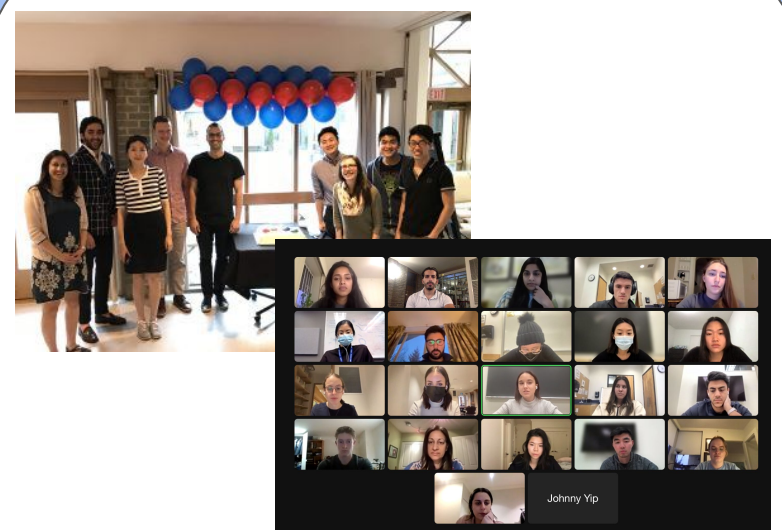


Figure 1. RHI Trainings. Students and interpreters in 2016 (top) and 2021 (bottom).

Tools and Training

To support our interpreter and medical student volunteers we:

1. Hold an annual training and meet-and-greet
2. Distribute a student handbook
3. Ask students to complete the Canadian Collaboration for Immigrant and Refugee Health (CCIRH) refugee e-learning course⁵
4. Have students and their families complete the VAST screening checklist⁶
5. Ask students to complete a reflective journal entry after each visit, and
6. Hold semi-monthly team debriefs

Future Direction

Reciprocal Mentorship: continue pairing refugee families referred by community partners with medical students and interpreters.

Community Outreach: Create additional outreach presentations and continue to present to refugee groups with community partners.

Research and Innovation: Initiate a QI project to evaluate RHI and amplify refugee voices.