



Oral Health Equity Project

Needs Assessment in City Heights

Overview

San Diego County is the largest refugee resettlement site in California; approximately 150,000 refugees reside in the county. In City Heights, one of six nationally sponsored resettlement sites, foreign-born residents comprise more than 42% of the community and represent more than 70 countries, 45 different languages, and 100 dialects.

A 2014 report by the Office on Refugee Health identifies dental caries as the most prevalent disease among refugees resettled in California. In 2016, through the Oral Health Equity Project, NSDI (Nile Sisters Development Initiative) conducted focus groups and key informant interviews with refugees, asylum seekers, and healthcare professionals on oral health concerns. In addition, NSDI performed an environmental scan of 35 dental providers in City Heights to identify and evaluate the challenges that refugees face in accessing oral healthcare services.

Survey Results

Of the City Heights constituents surveyed, 50% have Denti-Cal dental insurance via Medi-Cal coverage.

Of the City Heights dental providers surveyed

- 49% offer language translation
- 77% offer Spanish translation
- 32% offer Vietnamese translation
- <1% offer Arabic translation
- <1% offer Somali translation

Challenges

Language More than 73% of City Heights constituents self-identify as limited-English proficient (LEP).

Transportation Limitations to personal or public conveyance restrict access to oral preventative services. Low volume of Denti-Cal providers in City Heights requires constituents to travel outside their local community to access care.

Financial Denti-Cal insurance does not guarantee coverage of essential procedures, such as dentures and orthodontic braces. Constituents reported having to choose between incurring high costs for uncovered treatment or avoiding treatment until tertiary care is required.

NSDI Recommendations

Based upon the results of two community focus groups and an environmental scan, NSDI recommends the following actions:

- Generate support for ethnic and community-based organizations to conduct targeted outreach and education
- Advocate for policies that mandate language access to assist non-native English speakers
- Implement programs to diversify the workforce and provide culturally and linguistically appropriate dental providers in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods
- Support dental health insurance coverage reform to decrease out-of-pocket expenses for patients with financial barriers



Nile Sisters Development Initiative is a community-based organization that provides vital services to refugees and immigrants in the San Diego region. The NSDI mission is to educate, support, and offer training to refugee and immigrant women and their families to help them overcome barriers to social and economic self-reliance. Founded in 2001, NSDI assists refugees and immigrants to assimilate a new language, customs, and systems that are inherent to the American way of life. NSDI also is committed to mitigating health disparities afflicting the immigrant and refugee community by offering family advocacy and education services. These include programs to raise awareness of sexual and reproductive health, mental health, oral health, and chronic diseases.

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