Social Support Services for RIM Communities: A Checklist for Health Departments

The social determinants of health, namely conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play, affect a wide range of health risks and outcomes. Integrating social support services into a health department's COVID-19 response for refugee, immigrant, and migrant (RIM) communities contributes to better health outcomes and more successful prevention and mitigation efforts. In addition, it strengthens community collaboration and improves care coordination that may be sustained beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, helping reduce health disparities in RIM populations overall. Collaborating and partnering with local social support and community-based organizations (CBOs) enhances a health department's ability to provide culturally and linguistically accessible information, effectively respond to RIM community members' questions and concerns, and support RIM communities to follow public health isolation and quarantine guidance.

Consider the following actions for health departments when organizing social service support among RIM communities.

Social Service Engagement and Partnerships

☐ Learn about existing social support and wraparound services in your area; services may include temporary housing and emergency rent assistance, food assistance including grocery delivery, childcare support, employment services including unemployment benefit application and job protection services, immigration and legal services, as well as healthcare and medication access services

☐ Work with CBOs and resettlement agencies to connect individuals to these social services through partners or during events like COVID-19 community testing or at quarantine and isolation sites

☐ Understand how to refer people to critical free or low-cost social support services, including health services

☐ Acknowledge barriers related to fear or mistrust of social support services provided by, or facilitated through, the government and ensure appropriate confidentiality in communications with RIM community members

- [ ] Develop processes for reliable interpretation access to services and support in order to minimize language and cultural barriers

- [ ] Hire and support bilingual and bicultural health department staff who may be better positioned to reach and engage RIM communities

- [ ] Ensure resources and referrals to social support services are available at testing and vaccine sites, mobile and community testing events

- [ ] Work with CBOs, resettlement agencies, grassroots organizations, faith-organizations, community leaders and other partners to provide messaging and distribute items that will help prevent the spread of COVID-19, such as masks, soap, hand sanitizers, or household cleaners

- [ ] Consider creating project positions such as "Care Resource Coordinator" to coordinate wraparound services for RIM community members placed in isolation/quarantine

- [ ] Build into your COVID-19 response work plan: RIM community outreach, engagement and partnership with CBOs and resettlement agencies

- [ ] Utilize your State's 2-1-1 COVID-19 Hotline System and test the system to make sure it's appropriate for RIM communities in your local jurisdiction. Many states launched a 2-1-1 hotline which provides real-time COVID-19 information, resources, and referrals in multiple languages. State residents can call the hotline and receive interpretation services and information about COVID-19 prevention, symptoms, and treatment; information about testing; and travel guidance. Additionally, consider 4-1-1 system to find community services in your local jurisdiction

Isolation and Quarantine

If RIM community members are utilizing temporary housing facilities due to isolation/quarantine recommendations, consider the following actions when serving RIM communities in this context.

- [ ] Ensure that individuals who are separated from their community while in these facilities are able to communicate with loved ones and that their cultural needs are supported (e.g., culturally-appropriate foods are served, language services available)

- [ ] Acknowledge the importance of social connectedness in RIM communities and families and the impact such separation may have on individuals and their families

- [ ] Discuss any available support systems in place to ensure connection with families while using these facilities (e.g., internet, telephone)

- [ ] Work across different businesses and services to connect members of RIM communities who become sick or test positive for COVID-19 with support in completing applications for unemployment benefits, food benefits, and rental/utility assistance, if needed

Additional Resources

- USDA [Find Meals for Kids When Schools are Closed Interactive Map](#)
- Candid Learning [Federal and State Emergency COVID Fund Sources](#) for Individuals and Organizations
- Communication Network [State and Local COVID Financial Resources and Mutual Funds](#)
- Habitat for Humanity [Housing Help](#)
- Feeding America: [Find Your Local Food Bank](#)
- Salvation Army: [Find Help Near You](#) including services like Emergency Rent Assistance