

# Spotlight on: Immigrant & Refugee Mental Health

OMH's Spotlight series highlights the challenges faced by different New York populations. We recognize the unique issues surrounding immigrant and refugee mental health and invite you to learn more.



Office of Mental Health

## Did you Know?



Immigrants and U.S. born children of immigrants now **make up 27% of the US population**



In 2019, NYS was in the **top 3 states** for refugees to resettle



**4.2 million** immigrants live in New York State



About **1 out of 3** asylum seekers/refugees experiences high rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder

Refugees and immigrants can face increased mental health struggles caused by:

**Traumatic experiences** like family separation or exposure to violence

**Discrimination**, including structural racism and xenophobia, can occur as overt attacks or more subtle acts such as microaggressions



**Undocumented immigrants have the added stress of needing to hide their immigration status and stay hyper-aware of their surroundings.** This constant traumatic stress can increase mental health and physical health risks.

## Take Action

### AT THE WORKPLACE

**Provide services in multiple languages.** Learn the process your organization has in place to provide interpretation services to clients.

**Prioritize cultural competency and language access.** Make sure signage is culturally sensitive, inclusive and available in multiple languages.

**Take a critical look** at how your organization supports individuals from diverse backgrounds.

**Consider ways** you can work towards a culture of flexibility to encourage people to take care of their mental health.

**Make resources** for emotional health (EAP, public mental health referral sources) universally available in employees' preferred languages, instead of waiting to offer them when someone is having a hard time. Consider adding a mental wellness section to your weekly or monthly news bulletin.

The children of Asians, Pacific Islanders, and Latinx immigrants **have significantly higher rates of depression, anxiety, and PTSD** compared to the children of white European immigrants.



### Certain barriers can keep immigrants and refugees from accessing mental health treatment:



Lower sense of safety and trust in systems of care due to immigration status



Stigma and lack of education on mental illness/mental health



Costs and lack of insurance



Language barriers with mental health professionals and/or a lack of interpretation services available



Shortage of mental health professionals who provide culturally competent care and understand how to best serve clients who are immigrants or refugees

*Data from APA, DHS, MHANYS, American School Administration*

### IN YOUR COMMUNITY

**Reach out** to New Americans and actively welcome them into your community. Little actions can make a big difference in helping someone feel socially supported.

**Keep an open mind** and stay nonjudgmental when someone shares their thoughts with you. Remember that people experience and express mental health struggles differently, sometimes because of their cultural background.

**Share culturally inclusive and appropriate resources** with those who may need them. Local, regional, and national organizations specific to the community may be able to provide support. Passing along a website or phone number may be helpful.

**Make it normal to ask about mental health.** Check in on New Americans who live in your community and ask them directly how they are feeling. Thank them if they decide to share their struggles with you. Don't try to solve their problems or dismiss their concerns; instead acknowledge their feelings and let them know you hear them.

**Share your story.** Most people have struggled with their mental health at some point during their lives. Speaking openly about your own story can help others feel less alone.

## Need Help?

**Crisis Text Line:** Text GOT5 to 741741

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

**New Americans Hotline:** 1-800-566-7636

**NY Project Hope Emotional Support Helpline:** 1-844-863-9314

**Trevor Lifeline:** 1-866-488-7686 or **Trevor Text:** Text START to 678678

**OMH's Customer Relations:** 1-800-597-8481

There are many organizations that provide assistance and resources to immigrants and refugees, including religious institutions, human rights and advocacy organizations and counseling and community centers.

- [American Civil Liberties Union](#)
- [Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#)
- [New York Immigration Coalition](#)
- [NYS Office for New Americans](#)