



HEALTH



In this toolkit, you will find information regarding healthcare for your sponsored family. Please note that healthcare benefits and eligibility are different depending on the status of family members. People who arrive with refugee status are eligible for a variety of federal and Washington State benefits. Those who arrive with Humanitarian Parole status are eligible for many of the same benefits, but not everything for which a refugee is eligible. Asylum seekers are not eligible for federal benefits but may be eligible for some Washington State benefits. You can verify benefits eligibility with our staff.

Healthcare is an important part of the resettlement process. The U.S. healthcare system can be difficult for newcomers to navigate. Your role as a sponsor is to provide general information about how healthcare works in the U.S. and help the newcomer gain confidence in their ability to receive the care they need. You do not need to know about newcomers' health conditions to introduce them to the U.S. healthcare system. Instead, your role is to be the navigator and advocate.

Refugee Health Screening

After arrival in the U.S., the newcomer will attend a refugee health screening at a public health department. A refugee health screening is not the same as a physical or a typical new patient exam, although they share many of the same components. In many locations, screening clinics have formal avenues to share health information with primary care providers to ensure any health conditions receive appropriate follow-up.

Primary Care

Another health service provided to newcomers during their initial resettlement is establishing a primary care provider. Overall, the goal is for new arrivals to eventually access healthcare independently, and thinking about the most convenient location for primary care can help them meet this goal. Some tips for scheduling the initial appointment include:

- If an interpreter is needed, let the clinic know when scheduling the appointment. In the U.S., interpretation at healthcare appointments is required by law.
- Let the newcomer know they should tell the provider when making their appointment if they have a preference for the gender of their provider.
- When making the appointment, help the newcomer check if their health insurance plan is accepted.

Preparing for Initial Primary Care Appointment

Once the newcomer has made an appointment, it may be helpful to have a conversation about what to expect. Providing some general information about the healthcare system as well as specifically preparing for the upcoming appointment can ease anxieties. The following tips may be helpful.

- Clarify the different health spaces available in the U.S.: primary care, specialist care, urgent care, emergency room, etc. Explain that the upcoming appointment is to establish care with a new provider who will likely be the newcomer's main point of contact for receiving health services.
- Let the new arrival know that they should bring their ID, medical insurance card, and any overseas medical records to the appointment. Newcomers receive an Employment Authorization Document, including children, which includes a photo ID. If this has not been received, overseas identification can be used.
- Explain that it can sometimes take multiple appointments to address all medical concerns, and the newcomer may need to make a follow-up appointment.

- Make a transportation plan for the appointment and ensure the family understands this plan.
- Explaining healthcare confidentiality in a U.S. context can help ensure newcomers get the best possible care. An example explanation may be: "In the U.S., healthcare is private by law. No one can see your health records or learn about your health conditions without your written consent, including the government. Even though I helped make your medical appointment, I am unable to ask about your health concerns. In the U.S., even close family members cannot see your health records or ask your doctor what you discussed at your appointment without your consent."
- Your role as a sponsor is not to make medical decisions or give specific medical advice. Instead, any questions a newcomer has about their appointment, instructions a doctor gave them, how to take medication, etc., is a good opportunity to practice calling the doctor's office together.

Medical Insurance

Upon arrival in the U.S., all refugees qualify for medical insurance for at least their first eight months in the country through Medicaid. After eight months, coverage for refugees varies. It is important for newcomers to understand that health insurance in the U.S. is usually tied to employment, and once an adult in the household starts working, their health insurance coverage may change. Some tips for helping newcomers navigate medical insurance include:

- Ask a case manager for clarification on applicable health insurance guidelines. You do not need to be an expert on this topic but knowing whether to expect coverage to change will help prepare the newcomers.
- Dental and vision coverage is generally limited. This coverage may be only for emergencies. Free or lower-cost services for dental or vision may be an option.

Pharmacies

Explaining the basic ways a pharmacy works can be an important piece in ensuring the newcomers can independently navigate all aspects of the healthcare system. Some tips for helping newcomers navigate medical insurance include:

- Help the family choose an accessible local pharmacy. Even if no one is currently prescribed medication, visiting a pharmacy together and having the newcomers note the name and location can ensure they know what pharmacy they prefer once the medication is prescribed.
- In a pharmacy visit, explain what an over-the-counter medication is and show the newcomer where to find these medications. Then, explain a prescription and show the newcomer where they would pick up a medication prescribed by a doctor.
- If a family member is prescribed a medication, ask if they need help remembering when to take it. A pill organizer can be useful in cases where many medications are being prescribed.
- Ensure the newcomer understands how refills work. Help set up automated refills or let the newcomer know to call or visit the pharmacy once they are low on medication.

One of the most important ways you can support new arrivals in terms of mental health is to reinforce the message of patient confidentiality and that a medical provider can help refer them to any type of care they may need.

Mental Health

As in the U.S., mental health is stigmatized in other parts of the world, including many of the places newcomers come from. In some refugee experiences, diagnosis of a mental illness in their home country meant ostracization from family and friends, shame, and sometimes even government involvement. While many refugees may experience mental health symptoms, it is important to not assume that this is the case for the newcomer you are serving. As a Welcome Circle, one of the most important ways you can support new arrivals in terms of mental health is to reinforce the message of patient confidentiality and that a medical provider can help refer them to any type of care they may need. You may also play the role of helping connect a new arrival to mental health services if requested.

Other than reinforcing messages around confidentiality, you can also familiarize yourself with mental health resources available to refugees around the U.S. For example, find mental health resources for immigrants and refugees at [USAHello](#).

Navigating Health Care Independently

Here are some tips for how you can support newcomers to successfully navigate their healthcare independently.



Determine the literacy of the family and their preferred ways of keeping track of appointments

If they can read and write in any language, using a template like the one on page 15 of [CORE's Health and Hygiene Resource](#) be useful as a main location for all health provider or pharmacy information. This can also include the nearest urgent care that accepts their insurance as well as the nearest hospital. A calendar may be useful for tracking appointments.



Practice health activities with a newcomer

This can include taking the bus together to an appointment and back home. Role play calling a doctor to schedule an appointment together. Practice calling a pharmacy or picking up a prescription. If the newcomer doesn't need to make an appointment, practice by having them call the clinic, ask for an interpreter, and ask for the date and time of an upcoming appointment.



Remind new arrivals of their health care rights in the U.S.

Beyond confidentiality, this includes the right to interpretation at any medical clinic. The patient-to-doctor dynamic may have also been very different overseas. Explaining to newcomers that it's okay and normal to ask the doctor questions or tell the doctor if they prefer a certain treatment can help build confidence.



Create a note they can share with others

As a newcomer is getting used to independently accessing services, they may be nervous about venturing out alone. If this is a concern, use the note function in the newcomer's phone to write out their name, date of birth, and address. This note can also include information or ask a question. Then, the newcomer can show the text to whoever assists them at the clinic. An example text you may write:

"Hi, my name is _____. I need a/an ___interpreter. I speak____. I am here for an appointment."

If the newcomer prefers this in text or WhatsApp, you can text them instead.



HEALTH RESOURCES

Apple Health for Kids

Website: <https://www.hca.wa.gov/free-or-low-cost-health-care/i-need-medical-dental-or-vision-care/children>

Apple Health for Adults

Website: <https://www.hca.wa.gov/free-or-low-cost-health-care/i-need-medical-dental-or-vision-care/individual-adults>

Alien Emergency Medical Program

Website: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/alien-emergency-medical-programs>

Aged, Blind and Disabled Medical Program

Website: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/aged-blind-or-disabled-abd-program>

Pregnancy Medical Program

Website: <https://www.hca.wa.gov/free-or-low-cost-health-care/i-need-medical-dental-or-vision-care/pregnant-individuals>

Pregnancy Support

Website: www.3wmedical.org

Paying Medical Bills

Website: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/node/481>

Dental Care

Dentist Link

Website: <https://dentistlink.org/>

211 Program

Website: <https://wa211.org/>



PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

DSHS - Public Assistance Enrollment

Website: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/>

Basic Food

Website: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/basic-food>

Basic Food for Legal Immigrants

Website: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/state-food-assistance-program-fap>

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

Website: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/tanf-and-support-services>

Refugee Cash Assistance

Website: <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/esa/community-services-offices/refugee-cash-assistance>