



## LZC Summer Updates *September 2024*



### Director's Note

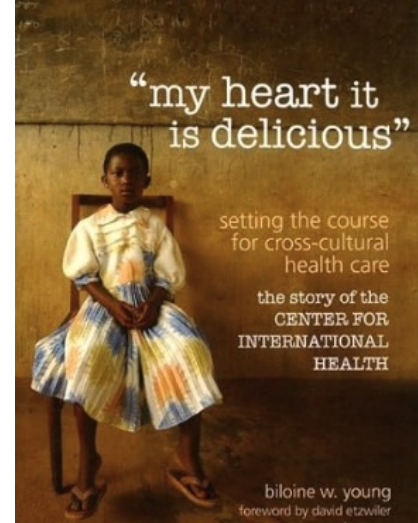


This summer, I had the opportunity to attend the North American Refugee Health Conference (NARHC), hosted by the **Society for Refugee Healthcare Providers**. We gathered in Minnesota, which many consider to be the birth of refugee health. A highlight was hearing from **U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar (D-Minn)**, who shared her own refugee story and noted the importance of civic participation for health equity, saying, ***"Minnesota doesn't just welcome refugees, they sent one to Congress."*** Dr. Patricia Walker told the

story of how she responded to the international crisis on the Thai-Cambodian border in 1979 and never looked back, charting a course for refugee health clinics in the United States, as told in ***My Heart It Is Delicious***, a book that we were gifted. Dr. Walker also mentioned that she is proud of creating opportunities for refugees and immigrants to become doctors and leaders in healthcare throughout her career. This struck a chord for me because one of our goals at LZC is to create spaces and opportunities to support immigrant scholarship and leadership. We do this by **hosting scholars** and by practicing community-engaged, action research with immigrant communities so that when we leave, our partners have the tools to foster further inquiry.

Immigrant health has come a long way since the start of refugee health clinics in the 1980s, as evidenced by the depth and breadth of immigrant scholarship and clinical leadership that was on display at NARHC (with a huge Massachusetts-based contingent!). We also have a long way to go. We need better access to healthcare for all new arrivals, as described in our most recent **Spotlight**

**on Access.** I need my brilliant colleagues of color to be paid and respected in the same ways as my white colleagues. I want all new arrivals to be welcomed into U.S. institutions, governments, and systems that acknowledge and celebrate their humanity. And I'm motivated to work with all of you to ground immigrant health research in participatory, interdisciplinary methods with a **structural lens**.



## What We Are Learning About Immigrant Health: Findings and Publications

### Access to Care: Multiple Barriers in the Commonwealth Impede Immigrants From Accessing Quality Care

Access to quality healthcare in Massachusetts is a barrier to good health and disproportionately impacts immigrants. This Spring, LZC developed a **Spotlight on Access to Care** and partnered with Brockton Workers Alliance (BWA), a coalition of immigrant workers in the Greater Brockton area, in a virtual **Coffee Chat on Access to Care** to raise awareness about the structural barriers facing immigrant communities as they seek access to quality care through MassHealth and other avenues. LZC's Spotlight highlights findings from a BWA-led community health needs assessment (CHNA) and synthesizes additional research to summarize insurance-related barriers, including difficulty understanding eligibility criteria, confusing enrollment processes, and insufficient coverage. Barriers unrelated to health insurance include lack of culturally and linguistically appropriate care, fear and mistrust of government programs due to public charge and other policy threats, and a lack of comprehensive guidelines and standards of care for new migrants. Leaders across sectors are working with and through organizations like the Brockton Workers Alliance, Health Care for All, MassHealth, MIRA, the Massachusetts Medical Society, and Protecting Immigrant Families Coalition to reduce barriers and pass policies such as the Cover All Kids bill to improve access to healthcare for all immigrants in the Commonwealth.

Read the Spotlight brief [here](#).

“El seguro médico del trabajo no me cubre para todas las enfermedades.” / “Work medical insurance does not cover me for all illnesses.” - CHNA respondent



## Spotlight on Access to Care Immigrant Access to Health Care in Massachusetts

March 2024

By Anthony Rumbos-Perez; Abhinava Dasgupta, MPH; Shyamal Shama, MPH; and Jessica Santos, PhD

### Abstract

Five U.S. states and Washington, D.C., currently offer state- or locally funded health coverage to all adults, regardless of immigration status. Massachusetts is not one of them. In the state's complex coverage landscape, many immigrants have access to limited health care based on legal status, age, and other eligibility criteria. However, gaps in access to quality care persist. When people are uninsured or underinsured, they are less likely to benefit from preventive and primary care. This increases risks for long-term chronic disease and mental health conditions. It also contributes to avoidable population- and neighborhood-level health disparities and differences in life expectancy over time, with communities of color disproportionately impacted.

- Access to quality healthcare is a barrier to good health that disproportionately affects immigrants; 30% of uninsured people in Massachusetts are non-citizens.
- Racial and ethnic health disparities reflect access gaps and social and structural barriers faced by immigrants from communities of color; 65% of naturalized citizens and 78% of non-citizens in Massachusetts are Black, Asian, Hispanic, or other/multiple races, compared to 17% of citizens.

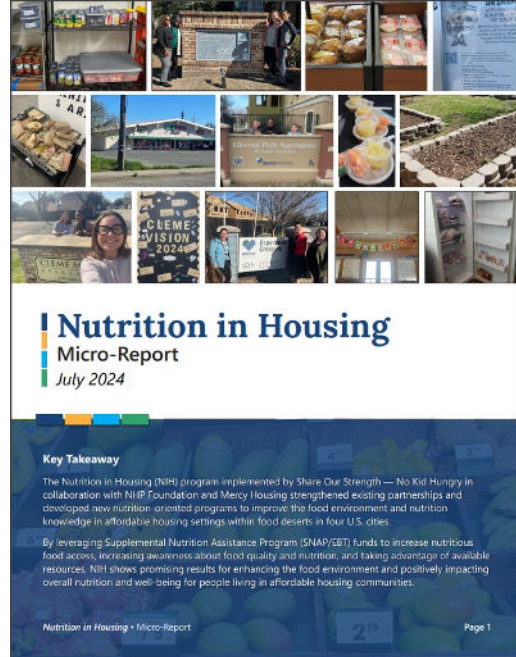
In this Spotlight, we provide an overview of Massachusetts' current eligibility landscape and outline the barriers that immigrants face when they seek access to quality care, highlighting the case of the [Brookline Workers Alliance](#). Drawing on Dr. Leah Zallman's legacy, we note the contributions that immigrants make to our society's public healthcare infrastructure, pointing out the intrinsic unfairness of immigrants being denied access to a service to which they contribute. We then provide some examples of policy initiatives and actions that either restrict or expand immigrant access to care and end with suggestions regarding further cross-sector collaboration for health equity.

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## Food Justice and Public Charge

LZC is partnering with Share Our Strength – No Kid Hungry to grow an evidence base regarding local food security interventions to benefit immigrant communities and improve health and well-being. In one study, ***From Fear to Trust: Community-led Solutions to Increase Food Access in Immigrant Communities***, LZC found that community-based organizations play a pivotal role in rebuilding trust in the social safety net among refugee and immigrant families, increasing access to food and nutrition resources. Community organizations' work helped to change the narrative and public perception of government assistance within immigrant communities, which further increased access to food resources. LZC and No Kid Hungry co-presented these findings to an audience of 200+ people across the country during a bilingual Spanish and English **webinar** in February.

Our second study, ***Nutrition in Housing***, looked at four affordable housing sites in food deserts across the country and found higher levels of perceived food insecurity in program sites than state or county reports, with over 60% of LZC survey respondents reporting some level of food insecurity. Residents, many of whom are immigrants, faced challenges accessing nutritious food due to a lack of transportation, limited budgets, and residence in food deserts. Through local partnerships, the four housing sites provided food pantries, cooking classes, after school activities, government programs (SNAP), community gardens, and new food delivery systems. These interventions brought residents into contact with more resources, bolstered the overall food environment, clarified the programs' focus on nutrition, reduced resident stress, and promoted family and community well-being.



## Celebrating Immigrants and Learning with Boston Partners

On June 12, 2024, the Boston Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement (MOIA) held its annual **We Are Boston** reception, celebrating immigrants and their contributions to Boston. Dr. Santos and Danielle Chun, LZC Strategy and Partnerships Manager, were invited to attend the celebration, at which MOIA released **Weaving Well-being in Boston**, a lookbook excerpted from LZC and MOIA's forthcoming report on MOIA's 2023 Weaving Well-being initiative. The 2023 Weaving Well-being initiative involved 18 community-based organizations that directly engaged and provided care to 2,177 immigrants.



Since 2022, LZC has been the research and evaluation partner on the Weaving Well-being initiative. The upcoming report builds on **Weaving Well-being: A New Paradigm for Community Mental Health and Wellness**, LZC's participatory evaluation of MOIA's 2022 pilot initiative, which involved seven community-based organizations. The Weaving Well-being initiative continues to grow, and LZC continues to partner with MOIA and others to learn from and expand immigrant-led, community-based mental health programs and services.



## Immigrant Scholars Contribute to Research on Social, Institutional, and Structural Determinants of Health



**Gonny Nir, BA '25**  
Brandeis University

*"Firms' capacity to genuinely make social justice a tenet of the work they do is something I unexpectedly took away from my time with LZC this summer. Especially in academic circles, I think it's common to view the private sector as profit-chasing and therefore uncommitted to truly uplifting communities. However, I was continually struck by LZC's researchers' personal dedication to bettering the health and wellbeing of immigrant communities through the ethical, evidence-driven research the Center regularly produces."*

Read more about Gonny [here](#).



**Jennifer Zhang, MPH '25**  
Harvard T.H. Chan  
School of Public Health

*"One thing I am taking away from my time as a summer scholar at LZC is that public health problems will not be solved by just public health-trained professionals. Cross-sectoral approaches are so important and necessary to come up with holistic and sustainable solutions to public health crises."*

Read more about Jennifer [here](#).



**Sima Bou Jawde, PhD '27**  
Northeastern University

*"LZC is at the nexus of combining evidence-based research while uplifting community voices, and I am honored to be part of this team as a fellow! I am very much looking forward to seeing the impact the dedicated LZC team will drive in pushing forth a structural and social justice agenda for immigrant health."*

Read more about Sima [here](#).

## Advisory Council updates



**Pastor Keke**

**Dr. Cassandra  
Pierre**

**Dr. Trinidad  
Tellez**

**Dr. Robert  
Marlin**

**Dr. Paul  
Geltman**

As many of you know, the Leah Zallman Center works closely with an Advisory Council that advises the Center on research and policy opportunities, and helps to ensure that our work is grounded in and responsive to the priorities of immigrant communities.

At the start of the year, we welcomed four new Advisory Council members: **Pastor Dieufort "Keke" Fleurrisaint**, President and Executive Director of True Alliance Center; **Dr. Cassandra Pierre**, Medical Director of Public Health Programs at

Boston Medical Center; **Dr. Trinidad Tellez**, Principal at [Health] Equity Strategies; and **Dr. Robert Marlin**, Chief of the Metta Health Center at Lowell Community Health Center.

We also would like to thank outgoing member **Dr. Paul Geltman**, Chief of Medicine at Pappas Rehabilitation Hospital for Children, for his service.

**Learn more about the LZC Advisory Council [here!](#)**

## Updates from the Institute for Community Health

LZC is a center at the Institute for Community Health (ICH). Through participatory evaluation, applied research, and other services, ICH staff work with local and national partners to improve community health in a sustainable and equitable manner. There are many exciting things happening at ICH, including projects focused on [racial equity in substance use disorder treatment and overdose prevention initiatives](#), [maternal and child health](#), [social determinants of health](#), and so much more. Visit [our website](#) to learn more about the work that we do and check out our latest [blog posts](#) and [publications](#).



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**HEALTH**

## Support the Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research at the Institute for Community Health

The work of the Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research is made possible by generous private donations that support our unique and intensive model of community-engaged, participatory research. Join us in centering the perspectives and knowledge of immigrants and growing future leaders.

**DONATE  
NOW**

### About LZC

The Leah Zallman Center for Immigrant Health Research is a research center at the Institute for Community Health. We are a team of interdisciplinary social science researchers with expertise at the intersection of immigrant, economic, and social justice.



A CENTER AT



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