



LEAH
ZALLMAN
CENTER
FOR IMMIGRANT
HEALTH RESEARCH

Research for
Immigrant, Economic, and Health Justice

Our Core Values

Equity, Collaboration, Joy, Fidelity,
Generosity, Impact



A center at the Institute for
Community Health (ICH)

- ☒ Participatory Evaluation
- ☒ Systems Research
- ☒ Assessment and Planning
- ☒ Training and Technical Assistance

Leah Zallman Center serves immigrants
at the Institute for Community Health
100 Brookline Avenue, Suite 1000
Boston, MA 02118

Impact Report

2022-2024

LEAH ZALLMAN CENTER
FOR IMMIGRANT HEALTH RESEARCH

Director's Note

"Wow, you are having BIG FEELINGS!" was one of my go-to phrases when my son was a toddler. It sounded silly but was a connection point and assertion that I would be there with him as he found his way in tough moments. I know I am not alone in having some BIG FEELINGS about the recent presidential election's impact on immigrant communities' well-being, feelings of safety, and sense of security for the future.

At LZC, we are grateful for the connections we have with many of you and as we strategize together about our respective roles in social change. We stand committed to the values of equity, collaboration, joy, rigor, generosity, and impact. We will continue to work in partnership with all of you to advance immigrant justice, economic justice, and health justice.

The theory of change presented in this report demonstrates how our collective work advances immigrant health. LZC's foundation is research. We partner closely with advocates, policymakers, funders, clinicians, and practitioners to ensure that our research is actionable and tied to community priorities. We are not policy advocates, but we take a clear stand when there is evidence demonstrating how specific policies or programs harm immigrants. We are not implementers or practitioners, but we study and uplift best practices in immigrant health programs, policies, or cases to be replicated. Our research also contributes to social theories related to multi-level drivers of immigrant health and structural solutions for equity.

Scientific evidence is not enough to create social change. Data alone does not make policy. We seek to advance immigrant health through public education, mentoring, technical assistance, pro-immigrant counter narratives, organizational capacity and strategy, cross-



Pictured (left to right) : Lisaury Diaz, Danielle Chun, Dr. Jessica Santos, Sofia Ladner, and Dr. Ariela Braverman Bronstein

Stay informed about immigrant rights in this unpredictable policy environment with the Know Your Rights materials provided by the [Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition \(MIRA\)](#), the [Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#), the [ACLU](#), and the [National Immigration Law Center](#)

sector dialogues, and the supporting of powerful immigrant scholars and leaders. This is relational, collective, and long-term change work. During different political and policy environments, we may find that certain tools work better than others as we seek to structure society in ways that support and sustain immigrant and community health and well-being.

Stay in touch. Stay informed. Take care and stay with those BIG FEELINGS if and when they arise!

Jessica Santos, PhD, Director

The

The Leahy

To partner with immigrant communities, advocates, policymakers, and social and health systems on actionable research to improve immigrant health and well-being

- Collaboration
- Equity
- Rigor
- Joy
- Generosity
- Impact

Research, Evaluation, or TA conducted

Organizational Partners



Theory of Change

This Fall, one of our advisory council members asked what LZC's "theory of change" is. The irony is that as researchers and evaluators we work with partners to develop logic models and theories of change on a regular basis. But even though we have a strong mission, core values, and a research agenda that we developed through a participatory process, we hadn't made the theoretical links to show how our activities create change and have impact. So, we got to work uncovering hidden assumptions, debating the boundaries and potential reach of the Center, and documenting our impact to date. Here's where we landed. ***How are we creating change and making an impact on immigrant health?***



Leah Zallman Center's Theory of Change

Research:

We conduct rigorous, actionable inquiry to build knowledge that advances immigrant health and well-being by:

- Identifying immigrant health policy opportunities, best practices, and cases
- Developing evidence-based narratives that support immigrant well-being
- Building theory and methods grounded in community and equity

Capacity and Learning:

We provide immigrant scholars and immigrant-led organizations with technical assistance and mentoring while fostering an internal learning culture by:

- Supporting the growth of immigrant scholars to develop into future leaders
- Equipping immigrant researchers, community leaders, and practitioners with tools and resources to lead anti-assimilationist inquiry
- Assisting immigrant-led and immigrant-serving organizations to refine programs, policies, and evaluation frameworks through systematic learning

Networks:

We engage with and connect immigrant advocates, policymakers, funders, and social and health systems to build cross-sector relationships, knowledge, and power by:

- Connecting leaders across disciplines with shared values to identify new solutions, collaboration opportunities, and resources to turn research into action
- Raising public awareness about how society can be organized to advance immigrant health equity
- Creating spaces that inspire and empower people to effect change

Research

16

research and
evaluation
projects

7

public reports
based on
research
findings

15

research
presentations

Mental Health: Weaving Well-being

Nearly half (46%) of survey respondents in a nationally-representative survey cited escape from violent or unsafe conditions as a reason for migrating to the United States. LZC's Weaving Well-being reports demonstrate how immigrant community-driven mental health activities support healing and mental well-being.

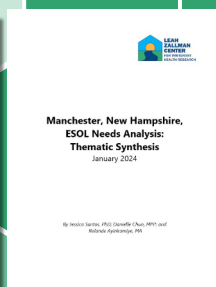
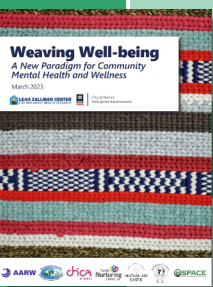
91%

of survey
respondents
said the
program

helped them contribute to the
happiness and well-being of
others.

"As an immigrant, at the beginning, staying away from my native country was not easy. I had difficult moments, and this experience made me want to help anybody [who's a] newcomer to this country." – Weaving Well-being Participant

Read our reports:



Public Charge: From Fear to Trust

In 2022, 43% of immigrant families with children in a nationally representative survey reported at least one type of material hardship. That same year, the “chilling effect” of federal public charge policies and narratives caused between 3-4 million children in immigrant families to miss out on public benefits that they were eligible for and could have addressed hunger. LZC’s [From Fear to Trust](#) research demonstrates how immigrant leaders and organizations funded by Share Our Strength – No Kid Hungry reduced fear and harm while empowering immigrant communities with direct food assistance, knowledge about their rights, linkages to SNAP and WIC benefits, and new narratives.



**In 2022, 16 organizations distributed
3 million pounds
of food and directly assisted
31,000 families.**

“I can share that once a family member is in, community members know what the opportunities are. They become empowered . . . They’ve been able to make changes and advocate at the Capitol for the bills that they feel passionate about that will help support their communities.” – Service Provider



Research Highlight: **City of Boston COVID-19 Immigrant Economic Recovery Initiative Evaluation**

Research has long established links between economic security and health. Immigrant financial inclusion is also associated with healthier communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many immigrant communities in Boston experienced disproportionately high rates of job losses, small business closures, COVID-19 infection and mortality, and anxiety and depression. Existing social safety nets did not sufficiently address these economic hardships and health inequities. Particularly since immigrants, unlike other populations, were ineligible for other government programming provided at the time such as federal stimulus checks. In response, the Equity and Inclusion Cabinet of the City of Boston launched the Immigrant Economic Recovery Initiative (IERI) in 2024, allocating \$3 million from American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to support long-term economic recovery in these communities. Last spring, 236 eligible immigrant families were selected via an application and lottery process to receive \$600 for the months they are enrolled in the program (up to one year) and are connected to caseworkers who ensure that they obtain access to financial institutions (such as opening US based bank accounts with low-or no fee savings options), job opportunities (such as trainings and employers seeking to expand their workforce), and incentives for participating in English or skills training classes and savings programs. LZC is partnering with the City of Boston and the Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative to evaluate the program’s outcomes on economic stability, mental health, and basic needs.

Capacity and Learning

19
Students

14
Schools

3
Spotlight Briefs

8
TA Projects

Learning Highlight:

LZC's immigrant scholar internship program provides students with opportunities to engage in research and Center strategy. Each summer, our cohort of immigrant scholars works to produce Spotlights Briefs—short, evidence-based issue briefs that break down a topic related to immigrant health in a publicly accessible style. With the guidance of the LZC team, the immigrant scholars choose their area of interest and hone their research and writing skills over the course of the summer. Our scholars also take leadership roles in events and/or share their ideas and research through writing, presentation, or networking opportunities, as described in the blog [Immigrants Like You](#), written by Abhirupa Dasgupta, MPH (LZC Predoctoral Fellow, 2023-2024).

People talk about “good” and “bad” immigrants all the time, but these experiences and the anger, frustration, sadness, and humiliation they cause affect us all the same, regardless of national origin or immigration status. We are all united by our ambitions for ourselves and our dreams for our families and thus, we as immigrants should be infinitely wary of narratives that try to pit us against one another.

– Abhirupa Dasgupta, MPH, LZC Predoctoral Fellow, 2023-2024



Capacity Highlight:

LZC is providing technical assistance (TA) to Vital CxNs on a comprehensive evaluation strategy that will support Vital CxNs' goal of establishing systems to assess, track, and communicate about the impacts of their organizational model as well as the collective work they do with their partners to advance health equity. Vital CxNs is a nonprofit that was founded during the COVID-19 pandemic to foster "vital connections among neighbors, organizations, and sectors [that] inspire and cultivate an equitable community health ecosystem." Their transformative systems change projects in food systems, maternal child health, and health equity are already showing great promise in a short timeframe. Meanwhile, they are simultaneously developing a replicable systems change model in real time. Over six months, LZC engaged diverse stakeholders in a series of interviews and held consensus-building sessions to collaboratively understand Vital CxNs' rapidly evolving theory of change and co-develop an evaluation framework. LZC guided the Vital CxNs team through a series of conceptual conversations designed to refine their model and develop metrics to measure process and impact outcomes. As a result of this work, Vital CxNs has clarified their strategy to advance health equity in Boston, and is considering formally testing and developing their health equity systems change model.

LZC Immigrant Scholars 2022-2024



Read our spotlights:



Spotlight on Asylum Health Equity and Care for Asylum Seekers in Massachusetts

December 2023

By Anika Kumar, Abhinava Dasgupta, MPH, Sara Snyder, PhD, MPH, MA, Emily Hahn, MPH and Jessica Santos, PhD

Summary

The United States' lack of a humane immigration system places inordinate and unique demands on local institutions. Right now, across the country, 2.8 million asylum seekers are waiting for a hearing, with an average wait time of 4.3 years. A steady influx of asylum seekers to Massachusetts in 2023 highlighted cracks in our housing, legal, and healthcare systems. These systems, which have been strained for many years, are reaching a breaking point. But we cannot sit back and wait for federal solutions. There is much work ahead at the local level to adequately welcome and protect people seeking asylum in our communities.

In this brief, we shine a spotlight on relevant policy systems, data trends, and historical factors that led us to this current moment. We identify historical patterns of racial exclusion, the unequal distribution of public resources, and our nation's track record for treating immigrants of color differently than white European immigrants as structural determinants of health. These intergenerational inequities are visible today as disparities in the health and well-being of different immigrant groups.

People fleeing violence and seeking asylum in the United States deserve equitable health and care – these are human rights enshrined in Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We describe one healthcare system's efforts to support asylum seekers' health by creatively leveraging limited resources, and we acknowledge the many efforts of Massachusetts-based leaders across sectors. We urge all policymakers, funders, healthcare leaders, and advocates to institutionalize the healthcare system's legal and social obligations to care for all migrants as a health equity mandate.



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

March 2024

By Anthony Ramboe Perez, Abhinava Dasgupta, MPH; Shiyam Sharma, 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.

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 *London Violence Alliance*. Drawing on Dr. Leah Zalkman'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.



Spotlight on Mental Health Restructuring Care for Immigrant Families

November 2024

By Jennifer Y. Zhang, MPH '23; Daniela Chun, MPH; Vinya Uribe, MA, PhD '26; and Jessica Santos, PhD

Summary

While the need for health services is universal, because of migration processes, the U.S. immigration system, structural inequalities, and exclusionary social norms, immigrant families face unique mental health risk and protective factors. Research shows that there are several defining life experiences unique to immigrants and/or refugees that introduce risk factors for mental health, including but not limited to:

- Trauma as a cause or result of migration (including voluntary or involuntary displacement, separation from loved ones and places, and the migration journey)
- Lack of access to healthcare services and insurance
- Lack of legal status (including fear of detention/deportation and exclusion from work, housing, resources, and rights)
- Living in multigenerational households (increased proximity to effects of the criminalization of immigration, intergenerational cultural dissonance, discrimination and "othering")
- Cultural and language barriers (including lack of access to diverse mental healthcare clinicians, linguistic isolation, and childhood language brokering)

Mental Health Service Landscape Gaps in Massachusetts

Overall need for adult mental health services: In 2023, 1 in 6 of all adults in Massachusetts expressed a need for mental health services.

Unmet need for youth mental health services: In 2023, 4% of children with severe depression did not receive any mental health services. Treatment access for children poses additional barriers because children and young adults are often reliant on older adults seeking treatment on their behalf.

Disparities in access to mental health services: In 2019, compared to 52% of white patients, 17% of Latino patients and 17% of Black patients with mental health conditions received treatment.

Networks

21
academic
conferences

17
community
events

2
Coffee Chats

3
annual events

LEAH ZALLMAN CENTER
FOR IMMIGRANT HEALTH RESEARCH

LZC Coffee Chat on Immigrant Mental Health

All are welcome!

- Join us for an hour-long virtual chat on immigrant mental health in Massachusetts.
- Talk with experts and share your opinions and ideas about improving immigrant health and well-being.
- The conversation will be moderated by LZC Strategy and Partnerships Manager, Danielle Chun.

Friday, November 8, 2024
12-1 pm ET

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

Asha Abdullahi
Executive Director and Founder
Somali Parents Advocacy Center for Education (SPACE)

Diya Kallivayalil, PhD
Co-Director
Cambridge Health Alliance Asylum Program (CHAAP)

Monique To Nguyen, MPP
Executive Director
City of Boston Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement (MOICA)

Please reach out to lc@communityhealth.org with any questions.

LEAH ZALLMAN CENTER
FOR IMMIGRANT HEALTH RESEARCH

Save the Date for
LISTENING IN Action

Learn from researchers and community experts, strategize and shape our Center's future work to influence policy and practice.

Thursday, May 9th, 2024
3:30pm to 5:00pm
(with post-event networking until 6:00pm)

The Center for the Arts at the Armory
191 Highland Ave., Somerville, MA 02143

REGISTER HERE

For any additional questions reach out to lc@communityhealth.org

LEAH ZALLMAN CENTER
FOR IMMIGRANT HEALTH RESEARCH

LZC Coffee Chat on Access to Care

All are welcome!

- Join us for an hour-long chat about Access to Care for immigrants in MA.
- Talk with experts and share your opinions and ideas about improving immigrant health and well-being.
- Moderated by LZC Director, Dr. Jessica Santos.

Friday, March 15th, 2024
2-3 pm ET

CLICK HERE TO REGISTER

Isabel Lopez
Founder and Director
Brooklyn Workers Alliance

Dr. Helena Kennedy
Preventative Medicine Fellow in Refugee and Immigrant Health
JHMC, IHC, HHS and Lowell Community Health Center

Shyamal Sharma
Visiting Research Scholar
Miller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University

Please reach out to lc@communityhealth.org with any questions.

YOU'RE INVITED!
POWER IN LISTENING
Research. Strategy. Immigrant Health.
Learn from researchers and community experts. Strategize and shape our future work. Influence policy and practice.

MARCH 15TH, 2023
9-11AM

DANTE ALIGHIERI SOCIETY
41 Hampshire St, Kendall Sq.
Cambridge, MA

REGISTER HERE!

CELEBRATING ONE YEAR OF
LEAH ZALLMAN CENTER
FOR IMMIGRANT HEALTH RESEARCH

HOPE IN POWER

OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE
LEAH ZALLMAN CENTER
FOR IMMIGRANT HEALTH RESEARCH

Welcome! Add your name & organization to the chat to introduce yourself!

"The Leah Zallman Center addresses a critical gap in Boston and nationwide by centering immigrants and immigrant communities in their research. The Center models how to engage immigrant and marginalized communities meaningfully, using research outcomes to drive empowerment and equity. It produces actionable, policy-relevant findings and goes the extra mile once projects end to educate the public about immigrant rights and well-being."

– Ân H. Lê, Senior Director of Policy and Research, Equity and Inclusion Cabinet,
City of Boston, Mayor Michelle Wu



Network Highlight:

On November 8, 2024, three days after the U.S. presidential election, LZC hosted a Coffee Chat with over 60 people focused on immigrant mental health and well-being. Our panelists Asha Abdullahi from [Somali Parents Advocacy Center for Education](#) (SPACE), Diya Kallivayalil, PhD, from the [Cambridge Health Alliance Asylum Program](#) (CHAAP), and Monique Tú Nguyen, MPP, from the [City of Boston Mayor's Office for Immigrant Advancement](#) (MOIA) shared a range of perspectives on mental health. During the coffee chat, LZC released our [Spotlight on Mental Health: Restructuring Care for Immigrant Families](#), coauthored by LZC immigrant scholars, Jennifer Zhang, MPH '25, and Vilma Uribe, PhD '26, and referenced findings from our ongoing [Weaving Well-being partnership](#) with MOIA. The informal nature of the coffee chat provided a space for people to express their feelings after the presidential election, and participants also shared examples of coping skills they are using to care for themselves, their families, and their communities during this time (see visual below). As we research structural solutions to reduce health inequities and improve immigrant mental health, we continue to learn alongside our partners about prioritizing well-being, as Danielle Chun, LZC Strategy and Partnerships Manager, points out in her blog [Community Care in Uncertain Times](#).

Strategies for Resilience in Uncertain Times





Our Leadership

We are grateful to the ICH leadership, LZC Advisory Council, and the ICH Board of Directors for their support and guidance.

LZC Advisory Council

Amy Smith, MD, MPH; Cambridge Health Alliance

Ân H. Lê, JD, MSW; City of Boston Mayor's Equity and Inclusion Cabinet

Andres Lopez, PhD; Coalition of Communities of Color

Cassandra Pierre, MD, MPH, MSc; Boston Medical Center

Dieufort "Keke" Fleurrisaint, MDiv, ThM; True Alliance Center

Marcia Bernbaum, PhD

María Rosario González Albuixech, MSPS; American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

Robert P. Marlin, MD, PhD, MPH; Lowell Community Health Center

Trinidad Tellez, MD; [Health] Equity Strategies, LLC

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Cassandra Pierre, MD, MPH, MSc; Boston Medical Center

Craig S. Andrade, RN, MPH, DrPH; Boston University School of Public Health

David H. Bor, MD; Cambridge Health Alliance

Ellen Lawton, JD (Vice Chair); HealthBegins

Gregory Hagan, MD (Chair); Cambridge Health Alliance

Karen Bullock, PhD, LICSW, FGSA, APHSW-C; Boston College School of Social Work

Joseph D. Restuccia, DrPH, MPH; Boston University Questrom School of Business

Leonor Fernandez, MD; Beth Israel Lahey Health

Paul Geltman, MD, MPH; Pappas Rehabilitation Hospital for Children



"Dr. Jessica Santos was recognized in 2024 with the Academic Council Award for her contributions to immigrant inclusion and well-being through the development of the Leah Zallman Center and in mentoring immigrant scholars. Building on the legacy of past awardee Dr. Leah Zallman, LZC has developed a rigorous, community-centered approach to immigrant health research at ICH and CHA. At a time when immigrants are increasingly marginalized politically, I am proud to support and celebrate LZC's approach that uplifts immigrant knowledge and power in our society."

– Dr. Sarah Jalbert, ICH Executive Director



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**Donate now to the Leah Zallman Center to
support our community-engaged approach to
advancing immigrant health and well-being
through action research!**



**Your support makes it possible for LZC to build a
cohort of up-and-coming immigrant scholars, center
the priorities of less-resourced, immigrant-led
organizations, and spread knowledge about building
healthy communities through public conversations.**



immigranthealth.org