



## **Refugee Health Collaborative Awarded \$1 M from IU Health**

*Partners include St. Joe Health Foundation, Catholic Charities, Amani Family Services, International House, the IU Fairbanks School of Public Health, Double Up Indiana and the IU Health office of Dr. Cho Mar Aung*

*Fort Wayne, Ind.* – Indiana University Health recently awarded \$1 million over three years to the St. Joseph Community Health Foundation to develop the Refugee Health Collaborative, a partnership of the St. Joe Foundation, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend, Amani Family Services, International House, Double Up Indiana, the IU Richard M. Fairbanks School of Public Health and the IU Health primary care office of Dr. Cho Mar Aung.

The collaboration of community leaders and partners will work together to help Burmese refugees meet their needs for physical and mental health services, case management, transportation, healthy food, job training and housing.

“We are grateful to receive this significant investment in improving the health and wellness of refugees in the greater Fort Wayne area,” said Meg Distler, executive director of the St. Joe Foundation. “We look forward to working with the talented staff of all our partners to overcome cultural and language barriers so we can welcome refugees and help them make our community home.”

Information from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) shows that as many as 80 percent of new refugees experience mental health challenges, especially trauma related to violence in their home country. Many have health conditions such as anemia and poor nutrition due to living for extended times in refugee camps. Almost all experience language and transportation barriers when arriving in the United States. (<https://www.cdc.gov/immigrantrefugeehealth/index.html>)

When refugees visit the office of Dr. Cho Mar Aung, Refugee Health Collaborative staff will provide screening to assess their needs outside of traditional physical health services. The refugees will be referred to a variety of culturally competent services, including case management, mental health counseling and more. Staff will assist the refugees in applying for benefits such as Medicaid, WIC and SNAP.

Catholic Charities will provide initial screening, case management, and mental health services. Amani will provide case management and mental health services. International House will connect refugees with trained volunteers who can assist with transportation to medical and other appointments. Double Up Indiana will provide access to culturally appropriate produce that can be purchased at reduced prices using SNAP (food stamps). IU Fairbanks School of Public Health students will assist in program evaluation. The St. Joe Foundation will coordinate services, handle grant administration and form a refugee advisory council comprised of Burmese residents who are already established in the community.

“IU Health is committed to helping make Indiana one of the healthiest states in the nation. The Community Impact Investment Fund lets us look beyond the walls of our hospitals to address the social, economic, and environmental factors that contribute to poor health, shortened lives and higher health care costs. This year’s grants connect IU Health to additional community partners who share our desire to make a positive difference in the lives of Hoosiers,” said IU Health President and CEO Dennis Murphy.

The grants come from the \$200 million Community Impact Investment Fund (CIIF), which is administered by the IU Health Foundation to address key social and environmental factors that impact people's health outcomes.

This investment strengthens the network of local agencies committed to immigrant and refugee services in Fort Wayne.

"International House is very grateful to join with these amazing organizations to partner with IU Health on this incredible endeavor to ensure that quality healthcare is accessible to our refugee and immigrant friends on the southeast side of Fort Wayne," said Heather Morris, Director of Operations & Outreach.

There are many barriers that may prevent immigrants and refugees from seeking care directly from physicians. This partnership allows for a more robust response.

"We are proud to be a part of the Refugee Health Collaborative," said Dan Florin, CEO of Catholic Charities. "As the resettlement agency in Fort Wayne, this partnership will allow us to expand the health services we are currently providing to refugees and ensure barriers are removed from obtaining continued health support and transportation."

In addition to addressing barriers, the Refugee Health Collaborative will serve as a model in delivering culturally competent mental and physical health care based on the latest impact data.

"Through the Gateways for Growth Community Survey deployed earlier this year, we now know New Americans in our community are twice less likely than local residents to access healthcare directly from a doctor's office because of many barriers, including cultural and language barriers," said Amani CEO Ewelina Connolly. "This collaboration is aimed directly at alleviating those barriers and supporting the continuum of services for Burmese residents by providing patients with casework and mental health supports that address determinants of health in a more complete way."

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#### **About the partners:**

##### **About IU Health's Community Impact Investment Fund**

The \$200 million Community Impact Investment (CII) Fund was established by IU Health in 2018. Administered by the IU Health Foundation, the CII Fund will support non-profit organizations in addressing social determinants of health in our communities and to achieve IU Health's goal of making Indiana one of the healthiest states in the nation.

##### **About St. Joseph Community Health Foundation**

The [St. Joseph Community Health Foundation](http://www.sjchf.org) is sponsored by the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ and invests in programming and operations that improve the health and well-being of vulnerable residents in Allen County. [www.sjchf.org](http://www.sjchf.org)

##### **About Amani Family Services**

Amani Family Services is a local nonprofit organization serving 2,000 individuals from around the world. Learn more about Amani Family Services at [AmaniFamilyServices.org](http://AmaniFamilyServices.org).

**About Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend**

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend is a private 501(C)3 acting as the administrative agency that coordinates Catholic social-service programs for the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical welfare of persons in need; seeks and determines the causes of social problems in order to better promote preventative social-action programs; and participates in community planning and organization within the 14 counties the agency serves.

**About International House**

International House develops and maintains services and programs that provide regular ongoing contact with refugees and develop genuine, long-term relationships, embracing them as unique individuals, one person at a time.