



## Community Health Briefs

### **Somali Community Resettlement Program — UCare**

#### Innovation Strategy

Fleeing war-torn areas of Somalia and Ethiopia's Ogden region, refugees of varying economic and social backgrounds found themselves calling the United States home in the 1990s. While a stark contrast to East Africa, the metropolitan areas of Minnesota have become the preferred destination for many, as family and friends report a welcoming community with a strong education system. In this new environment, many community members encounter challenges with housing, employment, cultural differences and economic struggles.

Recognizing these new community members need support, the UCare Foundation began funding the Somali Community Resettlement Program in 2014. The program aims to improve the overall health of refugees and reduce the health disparity gap in the Rochester, Minnesota area. The resettlement program works with community elders and religious leaders to communicate in a culturally appropriate way and facilitate discussion on health, provide information on accessing health insurance and plan coverage, promote immunizations and train partner organizations on cultural competencies for serving East African refugees.

#### Root Determinants of Health Addressed in This Initiative

- Exercise
- Diet
- Health Literacy
- Employment
- Stable Income

#### Program Description

The Somali Community Resettlement Service was established in 1999 to support refugees from Somalia, Ethiopia and Southern Sudan coming to the Twin Cities and Rochester, Minnesota area. Through a grant from the UCare Foundation beginning in 2014, a resettlement program focusing on improving health of the refugee population and reducing disparities was developed.

The partnership established between UCare, community elders and Imams, who are religious leaders, has been integral to the success of the Somali Community Resettlement Program. Both are well respected in the community and help carry out UCare's efforts to engage the community in understanding the importance of preventive health, chronic care management and the role spirituality plays in healing and emotional well-being.



Leveraging the relationships built within the community, UCare facilitates quarterly meetings on health plan benefits and the best ways to prevent emergency room visits, along with providing advice from local pharmacies on medications. In addition, educational sessions are provided on topics including nutrition, staying active, strategies to communicate with physicians, healthy cooking and others.

As part of the program, sub-groups have been established to further meet the needs of the community. One specific sub-group is geared toward senior citizens and encourages them to exercise while providing the opportunity to socially connect with others their age in the community. Currently, nearly 100 senior citizens take part in these daily walks. The resettlement program has also partnered with the Somali charter schools in the Rochester and Faribault, Minnesota school systems to provide education for families on health insurance, preventative services and the importance of immunizations.

## **Results**

Since the program's inception, the UCare Foundation and the Somali Community Resettlement Service have provided education and services to more than 200 refugee families in Rochester. The resettlement program has created continuity and stability of health services and education for families and senior citizens, renewing interest of many caregivers in the life and health of their children. The program has also facilitated a significant change in the attitude of refugees from when they first arrived. Many of them are now better able to understand the challenges and requirements their families will face each day in the health system.

The Somali Community Resettlement program serves as a critical link between the refugee population in the Rochester, Minnesota area and health system resources. The program continues to support capacity building with community leaders of several organizations forming a coalition that meets regularly to discuss needed support for the community. In addition, the Somali Community Resettlement program has developed into a model that can be replicated in other areas with large refugee populations, something UCare is considering in Faribault, Minnesota.

## **Contact Information**

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