



Emory Global Health Connection

Building Bridges for Better Health

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EGHI Introduces the Refugee and Immigrant Health and Wellness Alliance of Atlanta (RIHWA)



The Emory Global Health Institute is pleased to announce the establishment of the Refugee and Immigrant Health and Wellness Alliance of Atlanta (RIHWA), which seeks to improve the health and social services available to Atlanta's refugee and immigrant communities. RIHWA is a partnership among Emory University, Georgia State University, the DeKalb County Board of Health, the CDC, Georgia's refugee resettlement agencies, health care providers and clinics, and numerous community organizations. Its goal is to enhance existing partner programs to develop a comprehensive, integrated, and multidisciplinary approach to promote health and wellbeing in Atlanta's refugee and immigrant communities.

Fueled by his interest in supporting "local-global" efforts at Emory, EGHI Associate Director, [Dr. Parminder S. Suchdev](#), was instrumental in establishing RIHWA. After spending more than a year listening to members of the Emory community and representatives from organizations that serve refugee and immigrant communities, the alliance began to take shape.



"I was trained as a pediatrician and nutrition researcher and am definitely not an expert in immigrant and refugee health. It has been eye-opening to hear from community organizations and Emory faculty, students, and staff on how we as an academic community can help address the critical and urgent needs of some of the most vulnerable groups in our own backyard. I'm thrilled that we have helped establish RIHWA and look forward to working with our partners on this important issue," says Suchdev.

Dr. [Barbara Lopes Cardozo](#), a psychiatrist and medical epidemiologist at the CDC and an Adjunct Professor at the Rollins School of Public Health and the Emory University School of Medicine, has also been instrumental in helping to establish RIHWA. "In my role at the CDC, I have worked to improve the mental health of refugees fleeing conflicts around the world. It seemed only natural to find a way to improve the mental health of refugees and immigrants living in our community. I think through RIHWA we can find effective ways to partner with existing organizations so that we can provide much needed mental health services to Atlanta's refugee and immigrant communities," Lopes Cardozo says.

In March 2018, Kaiser Permanente of Georgia awarded the Emory Global Health Institute a planning grant, which has enabled RIHWA to initiate activities that will help move the alliance forward. One of the

most exciting activities underway is a conference called the [Clarkston Summit](#), scheduled for Saturday, November 10th at the Clarkston campus of Georgia State University's Perimeter College. [Dr. Mary Helen O'Connor](#), a Georgia State University professor, [Dr. Heval Kelli](#), a refugee from Syria who is also a cardiology fellow at the Emory University School of Medicine, and [Britton Tuck](#), an EGHI Public Health Program Associate, are working with Drs. Suchdev, Lopes Cardozo, and others to plan the Clarkston Summit.

This conference will bring together entities working in the community to share work, deepen partnerships, and empower the community to convey its needs. The Summit seeks to encourage a mutually beneficial exchange of ideas between Clarkston residents, community leaders, service providers, and the academic community. The event will include a morning plenary session and panel discussion, breakout sessions, and an afternoon expo featuring exhibits and networking. For more information, and to register, visit the Clarkston Summit [registration site](#).

"Clarkston is like the Silicon Valley of refugee success, where refugees arrive and achieve their dreams through the investment of people and organizations. The Summit can bring everyone together to create an official network to replicate this success," Kelli says.

RIHWA has also been conducting a community assessment of the refugee and immigrant communities in Clarkston. [Dr. Dawn Comeau](#) is working with [Suzanne Mason](#), EGHI Director of Global Learning Programs, Manal Sidi, and Lucy Whitehead, both EGHI Graduate Program Assistants and Rollins School of Public Health students, to conduct this assessment of both community members and the organizations that serve them. The goal of this assessment is to determine both the needs and assets of Clarkston's refugee and immigrant communities, which will help inform RIHWA's efforts to enhance and/or develop programs to better serve them.

"Community assessment is a critical component of developing the next steps for RIHWA. It allows organizations and people in the community to share their perspectives on the existing strengths of the community as well as what is needed moving forward. Furthermore, we can collect information that can be shared back to the community and hopefully useful to a larger pool of people," Comeau says.

RIHWA's goal for the end of the grant stage is to use the information gathered from community members and community organizations through both the community assessment and the Clarkston Summit to develop a plan for developing long-term programming and services.

"What we hope to achieve at the end of our first year is to develop a successful proposal that will lead to long-term funding for RIHWA services and activities in the Clarkston community. We're currently still in the learning phase, but our ultimate goal will be to translate what we learn into action that can help Clarkston's refugee and immigrant communities," says Suchdev.