



Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative

Alameda County | City of Berkeley | Contra Costa County | Marin County | Napa County | City and County of San Francisco | San Mateo County | Santa Clara County | Santa Cruz County | Solano County | Sonoma County

Monday, July 23, 2018

Office of the California Attorney General
1300 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Office of the California Attorney General:

The Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative (BARHII) is the coalition of the 11 Bay Area Public Health Departments. Collectively, our member public health departments are statutorily responsible for the health of 20% of California's population, with a charge to address the root causes of inequitable health outcomes. This work is most successful when we ensure people can seek health services. We also work to prevent the conditions that cause poor health well before residents see the inside of a doctor's office. SB 54 offers an opportunity to ensure access to care, immunizations, and wellness services.

BARHII's member health departments seek to ensure that our immigrant residents continue to receive life-saving and wellness services within our counties. We conducted a [Health Impacts of Federal Immigration Policy Survey](#) in 2017, and in 2018 we interviewed all Behavioral Health Directors in the region a year later to understand the health implications facing our immigrant communities and public health programs in this current climate. Additionally, BARHII assessed the health impacts of the North Bay fires, which included immigrant and undocumented communities and found chilling results. We appreciate the opportunity to share these findings with the Office of the California Attorney General. By providing our findings from interviews with member health departments, via SB 54: Law enforcement: sharing data, we support the development of model policies limiting assistance with immigration enforcement to the fullest extent possible consistent with federal and state law at our health facilities and our service agencies.

BARHII Rapid Response Survey Findings in 2017:

Intense fear, distress, and other mental and emotional health impacts has driven our immigrant communities to disengage in public services.

- 58%** are afraid to sign up for public programs and services
- 55%** are experiencing increased fear or other mental health impacts
- 43%** have family members at risk of detention and deportation
- 33%** are afraid to leave the house or neighborhood

"A client called to request cancellation of CalFresh benefits for her children, stating she feared receiving benefits would create legal issues for her in the future which could result in her

deportation. I informed the client her information is not shared. However, the client insisted we cancel her CalFresh benefits.”

“A patient told me she was afraid of going back to county clinic. She feels fearful that because we are a government entity we will turn in her information and illegal status to immigration authorities. Not only has she stopped seeing our clinic, her specialist, but also, she is reluctant to take her daughter to the Pediatrics department for the same reason. Her daughter who is only 3 has had a history of abnormal blood work, was set up to see a specialist for possible leukemia and is recently fainting.”

Interviews with Behavioral Health Directors and Staff in 2018 further demonstrated the exacerbated issues among our immigrant communities:

The acute fear of an encounter with ICE is leading people to isolate themselves.

An escalating climate around immigration takes away focus from addressing mental health issues, which can worsen mental health conditions if people do not get the treatment and support they need.

In some cases, however, there was an upsurge in behavioral health services. Not only is this devastating for clients, but our providers are experiencing vicarious trauma, leaving a deep impact on our providers own wellbeing.

Misinformation and uncertainty is causing stress on the individual, community, health and social service providers, and the health system as a whole.

The October 2017 North bay fires have been the largest, most devastating, and most destructive group of wildfires in California’s recorded history¹. The North Bay fire recovery response and chilling impacts on immigrant health:

Government employees from member Counties engaged in the fire recovery process and found that fears related to immigration status, and ICE raids in particular, were significant barriers to seeking shelter, service, or aid.

Immigrant families felt particularly afraid that reporting property damage and losses caused by the fire would draw negative attention from authorities.

Immigrant residents were hesitant to provide personal information to service providers during the intake process at the Local Assistance Centers or shelters because they feared that information would be shared with immigration authorities.

“At the college we were asked to walk through the parking lot because people weren’t coming inside. They were just staying in the parking lots in their cars because they didn’t want to go inside and because there was a rumor that ICE was there...So, we started posting signs saying everyone is welcome. But that fear was there if they are going to ask us for information. People wouldn’t even want to give their names.”

¹ “‘My World Was Burning’: The North Bay Fires and What Went Wrong,” KQED, 10-Mar-2018. [Online]. Available: <https://www.kqed.org/news/11654027/my-world-was-burning-the-north-bay-fires-and-what-went-wrong>. [Accessed: 09-Jul-2018].

REGIONAL REPOSES TO EXISTING AND EMERGING NEEDS OF IMMIGRANT COMMUNITIES

BARHII's member county health departments have already taken action to address the needs and health of immigrant communities affected by the current political, social, and environmentally hazardous arena that we operate. As model policies are developed via SB 54 to limit immigration enforcement within our public health and social services agencies, and materials are shared to educate our service providers, and the clients they serve, we urge the inclusion of Local Assistance Centers in Recovery Responses. BARHII's staff encourages the Office of California Attorney General's model policy development to consider including the following actions:

Launching media campaign and communicating welcoming messages.

Providing training for staff on policy changes related to immigration and how to talk to clients about immigration issues, including cultural humility, implicit bias, microaggressions, racism, and discrimination.

Employing outreach workers to have a presence in the community and educate residents about available services, regardless of immigration status, and hosting Know Your Rights sessions.

Holding town hall meetings to reach out to underserved populations and to understand their mental health needs.

Collaborating with schools to ensure that resources for immigrant communities are available and to better understand how youth are impacted.

Creating units that specifically address immigration issues encompassing legal services and health and social services resources.

Publishing literature about the impact of deportations on mental health and help families create family emergency plans.

Providing trainings for staff to offer support and resources for their own mental health and self-care.

Providing grants to community-based organizations that educate community members on Know Your Rights, available resources, deportation defense, and what to do when someone in the family is detained or deported.

Specifically related to Local Assistant Centers, policies should be drafted that mitigate the climate of fear affecting immigrant and undocumented communities:

- Providing welcoming communications via websites, printed materials, posters, and radio, in the appropriate languages, to reach immigrant communities and ensure that people understand that they are welcome at the LACs, shelters, and community forums and their information will not be shared with immigration authorities.
- Providing language, messages, and signage within the Local Assistance Centers that local police officers, military personnel, as well as FEMA Homeland Security are only present to aid and resources.

- Immigrant families should be ensured that services and support are available for them and that no one will ask about immigration status or their country of birth.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present our research and critical findings to keep our public health facilities, social services agencies, and Local Assistance Centers safe so that each individual in California can access life-saving and wellness services. We look forward to continuing to work with the Office of the California Attorney General on the important policy development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Melissa Jones', with a stylized, cursive script.

Melissa Jones, Executive Director
Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative