

THE ARMENIAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY IN CALIFORNIA*

BACKGROUND Originating from the region of Eurasia, which currently includes Turkey, the Republic of Armenia, and Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, Armenians have survived genocide, war, earthquakes, and a diaspora. In April of 1915, Armenians were subjected to mass deportation and massacre in what is now known as one of the worst genocides in world history. Armenians who escaped fled to various countries including the US, the Soviet Union, Iran, and other Middle Eastern countries. It is estimated that in the years directly following the genocide, approximately 25,000 Armenians immigrated to the US. The initial wave of immigration precipitated by the genocide was followed by continued stream of immigration to the US by Armenians from countries all over the world including Iran, Lebanon, and Soviet Armenia. In recent years, there has been an influx of Armenian refugees from Iran, Iraq, and Syria.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION The US Census 2010 estimates indicate that approximately half a million Armenians currently reside in the US. Many scholars suggest that this number is an underestimate and that, in fact, the number of Armenians residing in the US is most likely between 1,200,000 and 1,500,000. About half of Armenian Americans live in California, primarily in Los Angeles. Below are population estimates by region (estimates reflect an underestimate due to inconsistencies in data collection methods).

2008-2012 Five Year Estimates for Population By Region (US Bureau Fact Finder)

Los Angeles County	182,677	The Bay Area	11,552
Fresno County	9,823	San Diego County	4,827
Orange County	8,475	Sacramento County	4,059

ACCESS TO SERVICES There is a dearth of culture-specific programs for the Armenian community and many community members rely on informal networks of support such as extended family and friends. Key informants identified the following means of currently accessing services:

- Public Education Institutions
- Church based services
- Primary Care Professionals
- Pacific Clinics HYE-WRAP Program (Glendale)
- Armenian Relief Society of Western USA

IN BRIEF (CONT.)

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Acculturation Stress	Many Armenians experience financial hardship in immigrating to the US as well as difficulty adjusting to new cultural values and norms. In part due to the history of diaspora and separation, many Armenians feel intense pride in their heritage and fear losing their culture through assimilation. Acculturation differences that emerge between parents and children are a source of family stress.
Exposure to Trauma	Many Armenians have been exposed to trauma such as the earthquake of 1988. These experiences likely contribute to high levels of stress and mental health problems.
Stigma	Negative views regarding mental illness prevent many Armenians from disclosing information regarding mental health problems and seeking help from people outside the family.
Depression and Substance Abuse	Key informants identified depression and substance abuse as key mental health concerns for the Armenian community. Acculturation stress and exposure to trauma contribute to the incidence of depression and substance abuse in this community.

STARTING RECOMMENDATIONS

Build on Existing Community Resources	Given the importance of Armenian cultural identity and a tendency to look within the community for help, Armenians are more likely to seek services and to accept help from Armenian American providers. Armenians have established numerous community based organizations that, while underfunded, provide a valuable resource to communities.
Outreach and Education	Key informants recommended increased outreach and psycho-education to educate the community about mental health problems, signs, symptoms, and treatments. These programs will combat stigma and have the most penetration into the Armenian community if delivered by Armenian providers and organizations. Providing services through schools with high numbers of Armenian students may enhance outreach.
Workforce Development	A stronger network of Armenian mental health providers including psychologists and psychiatrists is critical in improving access to care for Armenian communities.

The CMMC World Café is a cultural responsiveness training funded by counties through the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 63). It is one of several Prevention and Early Intervention Initiatives implemented by the California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA), an organization of California counties working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities. For more information, visit www.calmhsa.org

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*The information provided in this fact sheet was obtained through a qualitative study conducted by the CMMC. For more information see the *“State of the State III: 2011-2012. Reducing Disparities in Mental Health. Armenian American and Deaf and Hard of Hearing Communities.”*

