

THE RUSSIAN-SPEAKING COMMUNITY IN CALIFORNIA*

BACKGROUND Russian-speaking communities in the US are comprised of a diverse group of immigrants, refugees, and asylees from countries of the former Soviet Union including Russia, Belarus, Lithuania, Estonia, Ukraine, and Georgia. Russian-Speaking immigrants and refugees have relocated to the United States in various waves since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Thereafter, immigrants arrived in the United States as a result of political violence, persecution, and economic displacement during WWII and the Cold War era. A significant number of Soviet Jews immigrated to the US to escape religious persecution.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION US Census estimates indicate that the US is home to approximately 3.5 million Russian-speakers, the majority of whom live in New York and California. While many Russian-speakers have been in California for generations, recent waves of immigration have resulted in a substantial newcomer population. Data from the California Department of Public Health, Refugee Health Center indicates that since the year 2000, more than 10,000 refugees came from Russian-speaking countries with the largest number coming from the Ukraine (6493 individuals) and Russia (2900 individuals).

2010 Estimates for Population By Region (US Bureau Fact Finder)

Los Angeles County	220,500
Sacramento	150,000
San Francisco	133,000

ACCESS TO SERVICES While there continues to be a lack of programs and bilingual services for Russian-speakers, the following resources were identified by key informants as current methods of accessing services:

- Richmond Area Multi-Services (RAMS, San Francisco)
- Russian-speaking therapists and psychiatrists in private practice
- Public Education Services
- Community Based Adult Service Centers (San Francisco)
- Slavic Assistance Center (Sacramento)
- Verdis (Sacramento)
- Sunset Mental Health Clinic (San Francisco)
- Complementary and Alternative Medicine

IN BRIEF (CONT.)

COMMUNITY CONCERNS

Social and Economic Challenges

Acculturation stress and social isolation, lack of financial stability, and lack of health insurance are key concerns for Russian-speaking communities. These challenges are exacerbated by limited English proficiency of many Russian-speaking immigrants.

Physical Health

Physical health issues emerged as a critical concern for Russian-speaking communities, particularly given a high prevalence of chronic illnesses such as high blood pressure and diabetes.

Mental Health Concerns

Depression was identified as the most pressing mental health concern for Russian-speakers with intimate partner violence, substance abuse, and anxiety also recognized as critical issues. Furthermore, high levels of mental health stigma prevent many from seeking mental health services.

STARTING RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Build on Community Assets:** Russian-speaking communities maintain close-knit social networks and emphasize the importance of interdependent relationships. These values enable individuals to develop a safety net that buffers community members from stress. Further, many Russian-speaking communities have a number of established organizational resources: grocery stores, community-based nonprofit agencies, and faith-based organizations that are important assets for these communities.
- **Increase the Russian-speaking workforce** to enable more community members to obtain services in Russian. Address other barriers to care by increasing the number of hours and services offered. Community members also emphasized a need for adult day programs and improving access to insurance.
- **Conduct culturally responsive outreach and engagement** with a focus on building relationships with churches and synagogues and building trust within the community

The California MHSAs Multicultural Coalition (CMMC) is a project of the Racial and Ethnic Mental Health Disparities Coalition (REMHDCO) and is one of seven partners in the California Reducing Disparities Project (CRDP), funded by the California Department of Public Health, Office of Health Equity. For more information visit www.remhdco.org

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

*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: 2012-2013. Reducing Disparities in Mental Health. Russian-speaking and Middle Eastern / Southwest Asian Communities.*”



