



Mental Health Resource Guide for San Diego's Refugee & Immigrant Community Providers

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Image: UNHCR/Roger Arnold, 2017

About the Resource Guide

Overview

This resource guide from the County of San Diego **Behavioral Health Services** (BHS) helps providers access mental health resources to support refugees and immigrants. Mental well-being is closely influenced by social factors such as housing, food security, financial stability, and more. The guide provides shareable materials and information about local resources and services for refugees and immigrants.

This resource guide is intended for **settlement, social service, community-based, and healthcare providers** working to support the mental health and well-being of immigrant and refugee communities across San Diego County.

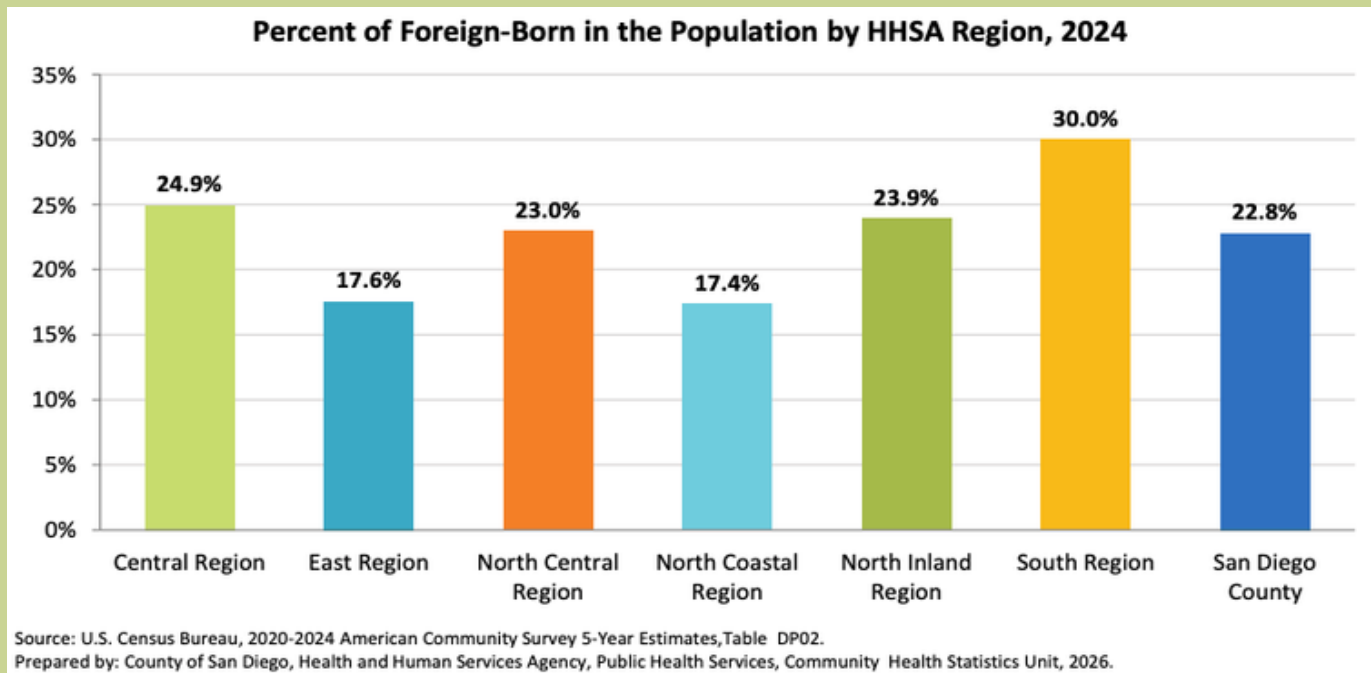
This guide supports local implementation of the California Behavioral Health Services Act (BHSA), which emphasizes equitable access to behavioral health services, culturally responsive outreach and engagement, and increased awareness of resources available to underserved communities. By providing information and referral pathways tailored to refugee and immigration populations, this guide helps providers connect individuals and families to behavioral health services and supports available through San Diego County.

Disclaimer:

This guide provides a list of resources that includes the most recently reviewed information available at the time of publication. However, the resource lists are not intended to be exhaustive. For immediate support, individuals may contact **9-8-8** for mental health crisis support or dial **211** San Diego to connect with local health and social services and community resources.

Refugee & Immigrant Population in San Diego

About 22% of the San Diego population consists of immigrants, including refugees, from different countries, speaking over 68 languages (SanDiegoCounty.gov). A **refugee** is someone forced to flee their country due to persecution, war, or violence. In contrast, an **immigrant** chooses to move to another country to settle, not necessarily because of immediate danger (UNHCR).



Context: Immigrants make up a significant portion of San Diego County's population, with their presence varying across regions and highest in the South Region.

Examining the Defined Stressors Faced by Refugees & Immigrants

- **Pre-migration:** Lack of jobs and opportunities for education or personal growth due to exposure to war, violence, natural disasters, poverty, or persecution.
- **Migration Travel:** Facing dangerous and difficult conditions, such as violence and limited access to essential services needed for basic living.
- **Post-Migration:** Barriers to essential services, poor living conditions, separation from family, uncertain legal status, and sometimes detention in immigration centers.
- **Integration & Settlement:** Poor living or working conditions, unemployment, difficulty assimilating, threats to cultural or personal identity, trouble accessing rights or policies, racism, social tensions, isolation, and risk of deportation.

World Health Organization, Refugee and Migrant Mental Health, 2025

Understanding & Addressing Trauma: Resettlement Stage

Planning & Preparing for Optimal Care

Pre-migration experiences such as forced separation, displacement, threats, or torture can cause serious trauma for refugees and immigrants. These experiences affect their mental health and can shape how they adjust to a new country.

When providers understand these challenges, they can work more effectively with clients and create plans, such as **trauma-informed care** and **integration goals**, that better fit their needs during the resettlement stage.

Five Goals for Integration and Resettlement:

1. Support refugee and immigrant integration by **restoring safety, stability, and independence**,
2. Promote the ability for refugees and immigrants to **rebuild a positive future** in their new society.
3. Promote cultural and religious identity while **rebuilding connections and encouraging participation in community, social, and cultural life**
4. Support refugee and immigrant integration by **building strong, connected communities and fostering trust** and effective leadership among refugees.
5. Foster conditions that **support the successful integration of all resettled refugees**, while accounting for factors such as age, gender, family situation, and prior experiences.

UNHCR, *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration*

Disclaimer:

While this guide offers resources to support refugee and immigrant mental health, it's important to recognize cultural diversity, including spiritual and faith-based healing, as well as communal support. Additionally, if reviewing these materials becomes triggering, we encourage individuals to pause for self-care and contact **9-8-8** to learn about additional support resources.

Understanding Trauma-Informed Care (TIC)

Trauma-informed care (TIC) is an approach that creates a safe and supportive environment for individuals who have experienced complex forms of trauma (Link: [SAMHSA](#)).

The core principles of TIC are known as the **Four Rs**: Realize, Recognize, Respond, and Resist Re-traumatization

- **Realize:** Providers understand the impact of trauma and recognize how it can affect an individual's development, behavior, and well-being.
- **Recognize:** Providers identify the signs and symptoms of trauma in individuals. This involves maintaining open and respectful dialogue.
- **Respond:** Providers apply their trauma knowledge by creating supportive environments and implementing trauma-informed practices to promote healing and recovery.
- **Resist Re-traumatization:** Providers actively work to avoid re-traumatizing individuals by being mindful of language, actions, and practices that could trigger distress or recreate traumatic experiences.

Strategies for Applying TIC in Refugee and Immigrant Communities

TIC Approach	Description	Purpose	Examples in Practice
Somatic Experiencing	A body-based trauma healing approach focused on the nervous system and physical sensations, especially when trauma is hard to verbalize.	Helps individuals regulate stress, process trauma non-verbally, and reconnect with their bodies.	• Grounding techniques • Breathing exercises • Body awareness practices • Gentle movement/stretching
Peer Support Groups	Group-based support that brings together individuals with shared experiences such as migration, trauma, or displacement.	Builds trust, reduces isolation, and promotes collective healing through shared experiences.	• Group discussions • Storytelling • Facilitated support circles • Partnerships with community/faith-based organizations

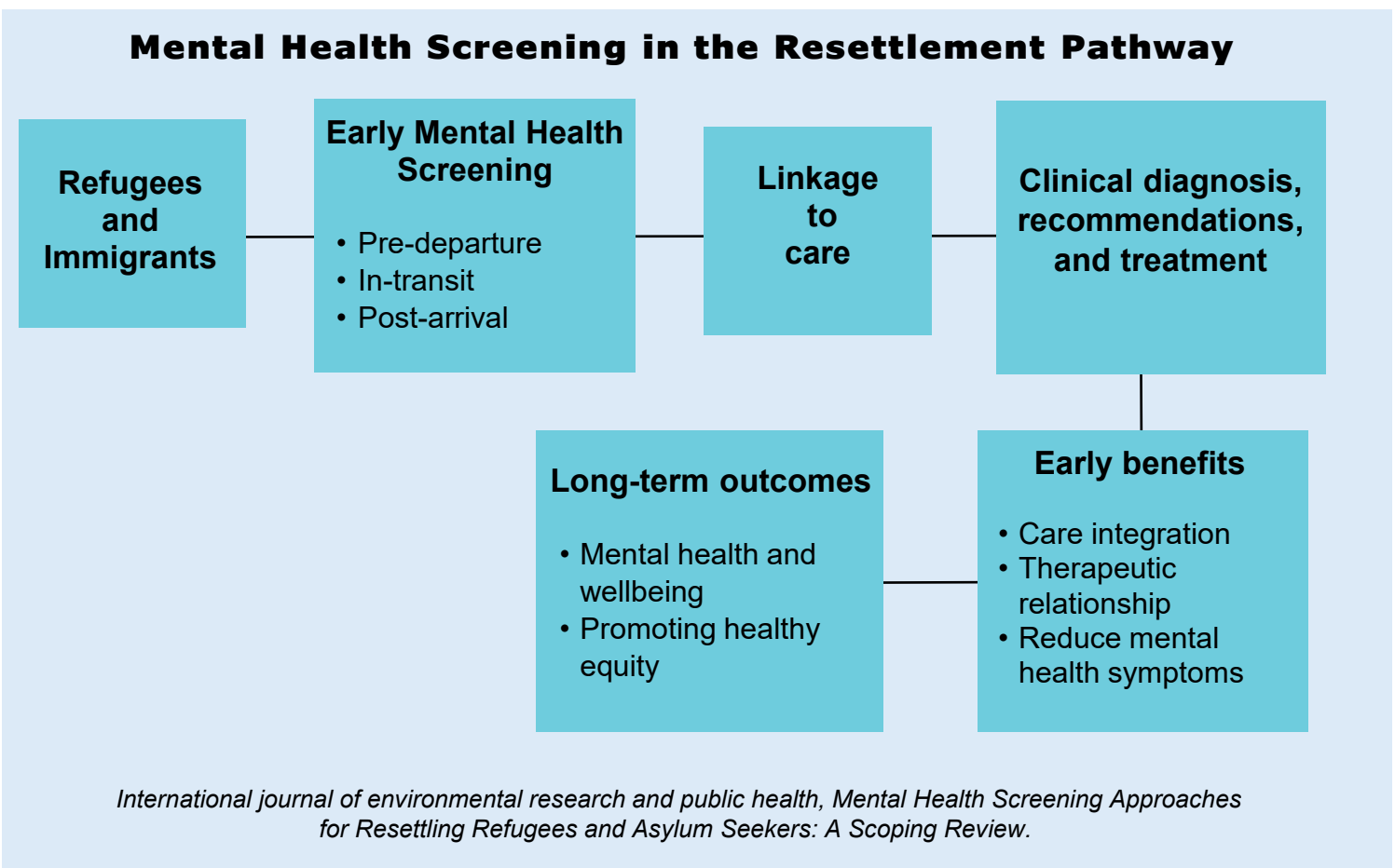
Additional Mental Health Resources offered by BHS: [30-Day Mental Wellness Practice](#), engage in daily self-care activities that support your mental wellness.

Mental Health Services in San Diego County

Bridging Opportunities for Access to Care:

The organizations and services listed below provide vital mental health support for refugee and immigrant individuals and families in San Diego County. By reviewing the resources, providers will find support options for their clients that promote mental well-being through crisis services and helplines, counseling, peer support, and navigation assistance with behavioral health systems. Additionally, services include resettlement support, such as food, legal, and job-search assistance.

For healthcare providers, the following pathway offers an overview of where mental health screening fits within the resettlement process and highlights key points for early identification and coordinated care:



Immediate Crisis Support

San Diego Access & Crisis Line (ACL)

About	The ACL is a free and confidential way to connect with a counselor who can provide immediate help and support, with access to over 200 languages, available 24/7.
Services	• Suicide prevention and crisis intervention • Substance use and mental health referrals • Community resources
Phone or Email	Call or text 9-8-8
Website	bit.ly/SDACL

Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT)

About	MCRT is deployed via calls for countywide non-law-enforcement crisis service, offering trained dispatchers who assess alternative response options for people of any age experiencing a mental health or substance use related crisis.
Services	• Stabilize people • Connect people to local care and support • Provide transportation to services if needed <i>Services offered in English and Spanish. MCRT can also assist in additional languages through interpreter services.</i>
Phone or Email	1-888-724-7240, or contact the Access and Crisis Line 9-8-8
Website	bit.ly/SanDiegoCountyMCRT

Crisis Stabilization Units (CSUs)

About	CSUs provide immediate mental health support and treatment services in a therapeutic setting to people with serious behavioral health needs who require urgent care beyond what an outpatient clinical service can provide. There are seven locations for adults and one location for children & youth.
Services	• Short-term services provided for up to 24 hours • Crisis intervention and mental health assessment • Medication assistance, therapy, and peer support
Phone or Email	888-724-7240, or contact the Access and Crisis Line 9-8-8
Website	bit.ly/BHS_CSUs2024

Mental Health Treatment

Behavioral Health Services (BHS), County of San Diego

About	BHS promotes mental health, resilience, and well-being through treatment, recovery support, and services for individuals, families, and communities. This information is valuable for refugee and immigrant communities who may face stress related to resettlement, trauma, and adapting to a new environment while navigating U.S. mental health resources.
Services	• San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital: Walk-in emergency mental health services are available for adults experiencing a mental health crisis. Call 888-669-8232 for additional support. • Behavioral Health Clinics: Access to multiple clinic locations increases the likelihood that refugee and immigrant families can find services within their communities. Find the closest clinic from 20 locations across the County of San Diego.
Phone or Email	1-888-724-7240
Website or Email	bit.ly/BHS_Programs

Survivors of Torture, San Diego

About	Survivors is recognized as the only accredited torture treatment provider in the region, offering access to care through an inclusive, culturally responsive approach grounded in respect and equity.
Services	• Health Education and Literacy Program (HEAL): Provides free mental health and wellness education services, including peer counseling sessions, mental health literacy workshops, wellness groups, and community resources. • To participate, individuals must complete the <u>HEAL Program referral</u>. • Eligible participants include refugees, asylees, Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) holders, lawful permanent residents, Afghan or Ukrainian humanitarian parolees, and individuals with similar statuses. Participants must be 6 years of age or older. • Mental Health Services: Providing tailored services for individuals, groups, families, or couples therapy. Licensed and licensed eligible mental health professionals work in specialty areas.
Phone or Email	619-278-2400
Website	https://www.notorture.org/

Refugee Resettlement & Navigation

Alliance for African Assistance

About	The organization helps refugees and immigrants resettle by providing services like housing, education, health support, and job training, with the goal of helping them become independent and successful in their communities.
Services	• Afghan integration and resettlement services program • Refugee resettlement and placement program • Immigration SVC program and legal service support • Refugee entrance assistance • Refugee career pathway program <i>Over 200 languages provided through translation and interpretation services</i>
Phone	619-286-9052
Website or Email	www.alliance-for-africa.org/

World Relief Southern California, San Diego

About	World Relief is part of national network of office that has supported over 500,000 immigrants and refugees to be welcomed into the United States.
Services	• Case Management: A case manager will assist with applying for Medi-Cal, CalFresh, Cash Aid, WIC, CalWORKs, SSI, IHSS and referrals to financial assistance programs and immigration legal service providers. • Youth Programs: Healthy integration programs for immigrant youth through <i>Brushstrokes-Refugee Kids Art Program (LB)</i> and <i>Teen Empowerment Academy (TEA)</i> by connecting youth through community integration opportunities.
Phone or Email	socalsandiego@wr.org
Website	worldrelief.org/socal/

Office of Immigrant and Refugee Affairs (OIRA), County of San Diego

About	OIRA offers support to immigrants and refugees adjusting to life in San Diego by connecting them with essential resources and services. It also collaborates with local organizations and resettlement agencies to provide various types of assistance to the immigrant community.
Services	Immigrant and refugee welcome centers in National City and Escondido open Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.
Phone or Email	866-262-9881
Website	sandiegocounty.gov/OIRA

Family & Youth Support

Jewish Family Services

About	JFS provides a wide range of services, including food assistance, immigration and refugee support, case management, housing support, and mental health and wellness programs.
Services	• Patient Advocacy: Support and representation for individuals receiving or who have received behavioral health services in psychiatric, residential, nursing, and substance use treatment settings. • Refugee Resettlement: Support families in enrolling children in school, learning English, navigating systems (ex: banking, transportation, and community resources), pursuing education, and securing employment. • Lieber's Corner Market: Offering a community food distribution program free of charge based on family size and need; individuals must connect with a JFS case manager to access services.
Phone	858-637-3210
Website or Email	www.jfssd.org/

BrightLife Kids

About	Behavioral health support for parents of children experiencing emotional or behavioral challenges. Services are available to refugee and immigrant parents of children ages 0–12 and are provided regardless of income, immigration status, or insurance coverage.
Services	Call BrightLife kids to begin personalized care for your family, including free coaching support and care navigation services that provide clinical care options.
Phone or Email	888-275-5357
Website	www.brightlife.kids/

Soluna

About	A free, app-based behavioral health support resource for youth ages 13–25 in California that helps young people manage stress, emotions, and everyday challenges.
Services	1:1 coaching, interactive tools, peer connection, care navigation
Phone or Email	844-582-2111
Website	www.solunaapp.com/

Community-Based Support:

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), San Diego

About	NAMI provides mental health support through education programs, peer-led support groups, national helpline, and more to help individuals better understand mental health and promote the reduction of stigma around seeking help.
Services	• Helpline: Call the NAMI Helpline at (619) 543-1434, available Monday to Friday from 9:00 AM–5:00 PM, serving adults 18 years of age or older living in San Diego County. Available in English and Spanish. • NAMI Clubhouses: Provide a safe space for members to continue promoting recovery, offering in-house resources, case management, outreach, and referrals to support participants. All clubhouses are open Monday – Friday, 8:00 AM – 4:00 PM. • East Corner: 1060 Estes Street, El Cajon, CA Suite #104 Phone: (619) 631-0441 • The Plaza: 465 C Street, Chula Vista, CA 91910 Phone: (619) 605-9706 • Casa Del Centro: 2754 Imperial Ave., San Diego, CA 92102 Phone: (619) 951-9007
Phone or Email	619-543-1434
Website	namisandiego.org/

Bridge of Hope, San Diego

About	Supports people in crisis, such as refugees, homeless individuals, and struggling families, by providing basic needs such as food, clothing, and community support to help them stabilize and rebuild their lives.
Services	• New Family Wednesdays: A one-time service where families can select available furniture, kitchen items, bedding, clothing, and food. • Friday Food Distribution: Every Friday from 11:30 AM to 1:00 PM, food distribution is available to all; a membership card and pickup time are required to reduce wait times. First-timers will receive a membership card upon visit. • Saturday Community Day: Every 2nd and 4th Saturday is the Community Day from 9:00 AM to 11:00 AM, offering food distribution, clothing closet, and arts and crafts.
Phone or Email	858-380-7993
Website	www.bridgeofhopesd.org/

License to Freedom

About	Serving the immigrant and refugee communities of San Diego through crisis intervention, case management, and providing a variety of trauma-informed services in multiple languages.
Services	• Mental Health Programs: Refugee and immigrant communities can access a variety of support services, from therapy to healing programs, that adequately meet their needs. • Service examples: Cultural integration & healing, education & outreach, community specialists' program, youth & family support, and substance use • Mental Health Services: Providing services at no cost while offering cultural and linguistic response services. To request services or make a referral, complete the <u>Confidential Mental Health Referral Form</u>, and a team member will follow up.
Phone or Email	619-401-2800
Website	<u>licensetofreedom.org/</u>

Community Support Note

Need support for a client in a mental health crisis?

Call or text **9-8-8** for a mental health crisis

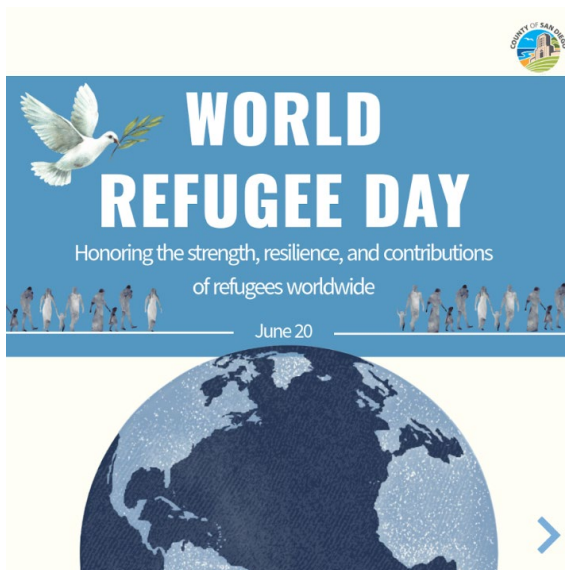
Additional support via 9-8-8 to find direct referrals to outpatient programs

Call **2-1-1** for non-emergency support, available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, in more than 200 languages



Acknowledgments & References

To complement our provider resource guide serving refugee and immigrant communities, we've included **downloadable materials** for social media outreach. Access the links below:

The poster for World Refugee Day features a white dove in flight at the top left. The text "WORLD REFUGEE DAY" is prominently displayed in large, bold, white letters on a blue background. Below this, a smaller line of text reads "Honoring the strength, resilience, and contributions of refugees worldwide". At the bottom, there is a silhouette of a globe showing the Americas, and a small blue arrow pointing to the right. The date "June 20" is also visible.

What is World Refugee Day?

Caption Option: June 20th celebrates World Refugee Day. Today and every day, we recognize the strength and resilience of our refugee and immigrant communities!

Read the What is World Refugee Day Post Guide (bit.ly/RefugeeDay2026)

References

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3. Magwood, Olivia, et al. "Mental Health Screening Approaches for Resettling Refugees and Asylum Seekers: A Scoping Review." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 19, no. 6, Mar. 2022, p. 3549, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19063549>.
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