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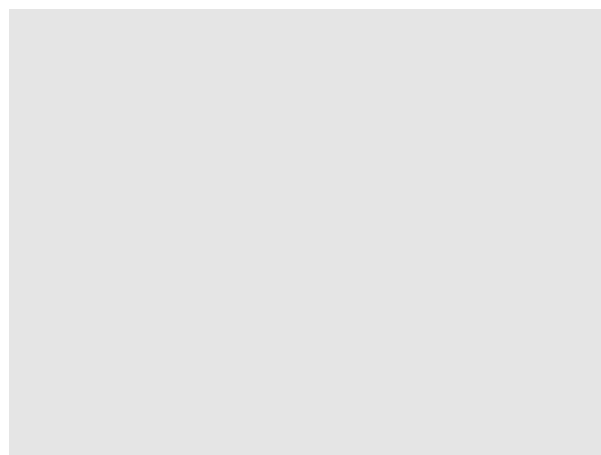
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WKU to present first local refugee health summit

AARON MUDD amudd@bgdailynews.com 2 hrs ago



Michelle Reece

Submitted

Next week, health care providers, students, refugees, public health officials and other community members will gather to explore and better understand refugee health concerns during the first Refugee Health Summit in Bowling Green.

The summit, organized by Western Kentucky University's Department of Public Health in partnership with the International Center of Kentucky, will be from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. at the Knicely Conference Center, 2355 Nashville Road. The summit is free and open to the public.

“We want to ensure that health providers in our community experience greater awareness about what are some of the issues and how to deal more appropriately and effectively with our new residents,” said Michelle Reece, an assistant professor of public health at WKU whose work involves improving cultural competence among health care professionals.

For Reece, the focus of the summit is two-fold, with the first reason being that some of the health issues refugees are entirely new to local health care professionals. While Bowling Green has mental health care professionals, for example, they might not have experience treating patients who've experienced the persecution refugees are often victims of, such as torture, imprisonment or enslavement.

Second, Reece said the summit is also meant to help improve how people view refugees.

“We want to be able to put faces to the word 'refugees,' ” Reece said.

In addition to their unique health issues, refugees also face unique challenges in accessing care, Reece said.

“Navigating the health care system on your own is difficult. ... It's difficult when you have a language barrier. It's difficult when you have cultural differences,” Reece said.



That's why students will be key participants in the summit. According to Reece, health outcomes for refugees will only improve once new health care professionals are equipped with the skills to treat them, and that means starting early.

“WKU is really strategically placed in that we are training future health service providers,” Reece said, adding that exposing health care students to that in college is “crucial.”

– To register, visit https://www.wku.edu/publichealth/refugee_health/.

– Follow education reporter Aaron Mudd on Twitter @BGDN_edbeat or visit bgdailynews.com.

Aaron Mudd

Education reporter. Covers education and related issues, focusing primarily on the Bowling Green and Warren County public school districts and Western Kentucky University.