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WKU to host refugee health summit

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Western Kentucky University's Department of Public Health will host the WKU Refugee Health Summit from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. April 18 at the Knicely Conference Center, 2355 Nashville Road.

The Refugee Health Summit will be the first of its kind in Bowling Green and will serve as a community outreach effort to promote refugee health and associated refugee health concerns. Bowling Green, home to approximately 63,600 residents, is the third-largest metropolitan area in the Commonwealth, and is among the leaders in refugee resettlement in the state.

The summit will share research findings from the Provider Needs in Refugee Health Services study to increase awareness among refugee and provider communities, and improve the narrative on refugees and refugee health in the state and across the nation. The summit will foster dialogue and develop meaningful action to address the health needs of the refugee community.

Participants in the summit will include healthcare and health service providers, community health workers, resettlement officials, case managers, health educators, researchers, students, therapists, public health officials, community members, refugees and other interested parties to discuss refugee health concerns and factors that impact the health and well-being of new residents.

After this conference, participants should be able to discuss unique aspects of the provision of healthcare to refugees; describe disease processes and health concerns prevalent among refugee groups in our local community; employ appropriate strategies for implementing

culturally and linguistically appropriate medical care to refugees; identify and implement reduced cost methods for improving language services for refugees; and build a network of stakeholders who are willing to join forces to impact policy and improve refugee health in the region and beyond.

A primary partner in the summit is the International Center of Kentucky, the refugee resettlement agency in Bowling Green. The International Center of Kentucky reports that since its founding in 1981, their team has assisted in the resettlement of more than 10,000 refugees, asylees, other immigrants, victims of human trafficking, parolees and other persons needing assistance to integrate into the community. At least 30 countries have been represented in the process that included numerous foreign languages and dialects.

Bowling Green is third in the state for number of refugees resettled. Officials, researchers and others recognize the changes that are occurring around the world as well as here in the United States that are impacting the health and well-being of new residents. Decreasing numbers of refugees entering the United States, budget cuts for program support, unconscious bias and persistent negative preconceptions of refugee status are additional challenges new residents face.

Persistent health problems, time constraints for provider-patient interactions, limited or inadequate culturally competency training to clinicians, medical facility staff, and other providers in delivering services create challenges to the provision of appropriate care. Some services providers are unable to deliver the most appropriate, and inclusive care and services. These factors impact patient health outcomes for all Americans and even more-so for our new, ethnically and culturally diverse residents.

Refugees arrive after having either experienced severe trauma, famine, torture, political strife, civil war, trafficking, refugee camp distress, destroyed family and other forms of violence and fear. Moving to a new country is both relief and anxiety provoking.

“We want to welcome our new neighbors and do all we can to help them to become integrated into our society and to add to the richness of our community as they set up home, learn new cultural norms, learn a new language, navigate a different healthcare system, as well as pursue education, employment, and the ideals of American life, the press release stated.

This summit falls in line with WKU’s mission, social responsibility values and the scope of international reach. WKU remains in position to positively impact the lives of new immigrants beyond academia by fostering and modeling inclusion and diversity in recruitment and training of health professionals from among these groups; by creating safe spaces for dialogue and interaction that encourages others to create diverse and inclusive spaces in their own environments; as well as help create linkages to resources and networks for services.

Some of the topics to be covered in plenary and concurrent sessions include mental health/substance abuse: refugee screening and interventions-improving mental health outcomes; medical interpretation and cultural nuances; interpretation and translation services: challenges to achieving cultural and linguistic competency; enduring challenges in adult and pediatric oral care among refugees; cultural awareness, diversity and inclusion and what does that all mean for refugee health; creating culturally competent healthcare environments; health literacy and complex medical information; incarceration, the u.s. justice system and impact on refugee family health; human trafficking and implications for health service providers. The final session will address challenges and best practices in refugee health services: adjusting the narrative for successful partnerships and capacity building and a call to action.

This summit is free and open to the public. To register, visit https://www.wku.edu/publichealth/refugee_health/.

For information, contact Dr. Michelle Reece at michelle.reece@wku.edu or(270-745-4741).

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