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IH prepares for health-care needs of refugees

The New Year marks a new beginning for Syrian refugees arriving in the Interior region. Refugees will face many challenges as they adjust to new homes, new lives and a new health-care system. Interior Health and its community partners have been working hard over the past several weeks to help ease that transition and be prepared to meet the health-care needs of the new residents, who began arriving in the region earlier this month.

Over the next three months, the Interior region is expecting up to 400 Syrian refugees. The Interior region typically sees an average of 1000 refugees arrive in the area each year.

“This is certainly a higher number than we are used to in a very short time period. It has provided us with an opportunity to focus on ensuring high quality, evidence-based health care for refugees and for all newcomers to our region,” said Dr. Trevor Corneil, Chief Medical Health Officer and Vice President of Population Health.

Interior Health’s Population Health department has been working with primary care centres, physicians and other health-care providers, community agencies and local municipalities to develop a response plan to meet the health-care needs of refugees. The team has been working closely with staff from the Bridge Clinic in Vancouver - a preventive and primary care clinic for refugees in the Greater Vancouver area. Together, they have developed protocols, tools and training for health-care providers in the region.

“Although basic health screening takes place prior to refugees’ arrival in Canada, at the local level we have to be prepared to deliver health-care services once they arrive in our region. Immediate health-care needs will range from immunizations to access to medications and mental health supports,” said Leslie Bryant MacLean, Program Manager, Population Health. “We have been working to ensure providers have access to the information they need to provide care in a culturally sensitive manner, while also addressing challenges such as language barriers.”

The Interior region receives approximately 11,000 newcomers to the area each year – this includes refugees, immigrants, and temporary workers. The new care protocols and pathways are expected to improve care for all newcomers to the region.

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