



**Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre  
Health Services for Syrian Refugees  
Progress Report**

June 13, 2016



## **Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre Health Services for Syrian Refugees**

### **○ Background**

Hamilton Urban Core is a non-profit, community-based agency providing essential health and social services, primary health care services, health promotion programs, counselling, education and advocacy to people who are homeless or at risk of being homeless, immigrants and refugees, people living with mental illness, individuals and families living in poverty, people with chronic and complex health and social conditions, isolated seniors and street involved youth. Services are provided on-site and at outreach points-of-service.

Hamilton Urban Core provides services to approximately 8,000 active registered clients the majority of which are living with low-income and a significant number of who are newcomers, immigrants and refugees. We provide services to clients in many languages such as Somali, Hungarian, Czech, Arabic, Vietnamese, Mandarin, Albanian, Slovakian, Roma, Persian, and Sudanese. Our client populations represent communities from all over the world including Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, the Congo, Somalia Nigeria, Jamaica, Korea, Pakistan, Kenya, China, Vietnamese, South Africa, Columbia, Mexico, El Salvador, Iran and many more.

Hamilton is a choice for settlement for many newcomers in Canada. With each wave of newly settling communities we ensure that we provide relevant supportive services to assist with their settlement. We operate from a model of health and well-being that is framed by health equity and the social determinants and is client and community focused, and culturally safe. We also work closely with the reception center and other immigrant serving agencies whose role it is to welcome and provide services for newcomers.

### **○ Introduction**

This report contains information about the approach and services provided to refugees from Syria who accessed services at Hamilton Urban Core.

Syrian individuals and families began arriving in Hamilton on December 21, 2015 under the Government Assisted Refugees program. Hamilton Urban Core started conducting initial health assessment screenings from December 22, 2015. As of May 2, 2016, 982 Syrian refugees have arrived in Hamilton and of these, 453 have been engaged with and are clients of Hamilton Urban Core.

## Health Services for Syrian Refugees Timeline



### Hamilton Syrian Health Table

Hamilton Urban Core along with other health providers in Hamilton met as part of the Hamilton Syrian Health Table to strategize on how the city was going to respond to the Syrian newcomers. The goals of the Table were to:

- provide immediate response
- conduct initial health assessments using a common tool
- coordinate triage in accordance with the urgency and complexity of health care needs
- identify and engage health care providers through understanding capacity, service availability and ability to participate in the triage process

Building on the previous experience of Hamilton Urban Core and Wesley Urban Ministries in providing health services to recently arrived refugees, health response protocols were developed and a standardized assessment tool was identified to be used by the group. Agencies at the table identified their capacity and ability to respond to the anticipated health needs of the

Syrian refugees. Communication protocols were established to ensure a more seamless integration of services. The Hamilton Syrian Health Table first met November 2, 2015 and has continued to meet frequently.

Members of Hamilton Syrian Health Table include: Wesley Urban Ministries, Hamilton Urban Core Community Health Centre, North Hamilton Community Health Centre, Refuge: Hamilton Centre for Newcomer Health, McMaster Family Health Team, Hamilton Family Health Team, Hamilton Public Health – Emergency Response Services, and Hamilton Niagara Haldimand Brant Local Health Integration Network (HNHB LHIN).



### **Cultural Competence & Cultural Safety Webinar**

Hamilton Urban Core, North Hamilton and Refuge worked collaboratively to develop and present a Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety webinar that was offered on January 12, 2016 to health care providers across agencies. The webinar focused on building knowledge and using information to understand the client experience and promote culturally safe client engagement. It also explored access to health care using an equity lens and reviewed some commonly used terms. The webinar sought to recognize settlement stressors experienced by new refugees and the effects on their health. It further identified the Social Determinants of Health and how these may affect Syrian refugees.

### **Initial Health Assessments**

To date, Hamilton Urban Core has completed 318 initial health assessments using the common assessment tool, Evidence-Based Preventive Care Checklist for New Immigrants and Refugees. The assessment tool was used as part of the Triage Process for the Syrian newcomers. Triage assessments were completed at various temporary residences across Hamilton, such as hotels and the reception house. After this step was completed the clients were scheduled for follow-up health care appointments with the primary health care team at Hamilton Urban Core. Here, more in-depth tests are completed and clients are referred to specialists and other disciplines as identified by the initial health assessment.

### **Influenza Clinics**

Under the auspices of Hamilton Urban Core, the Hamilton Family Health Team provided 564 Influenza vaccinations over a period of 16 days, from January 25, 2016 to February 16, 2016. Outreach vaccination clinics were set up at various temporary accommodations, again such as hotels and the reception house, across the city of Hamilton. The vaccinations were offered to all the Syrian newcomers. Vaccinations were supplied by Hamilton Public Health. Hamilton Family Health Team provided Nurses to administer the vaccines.

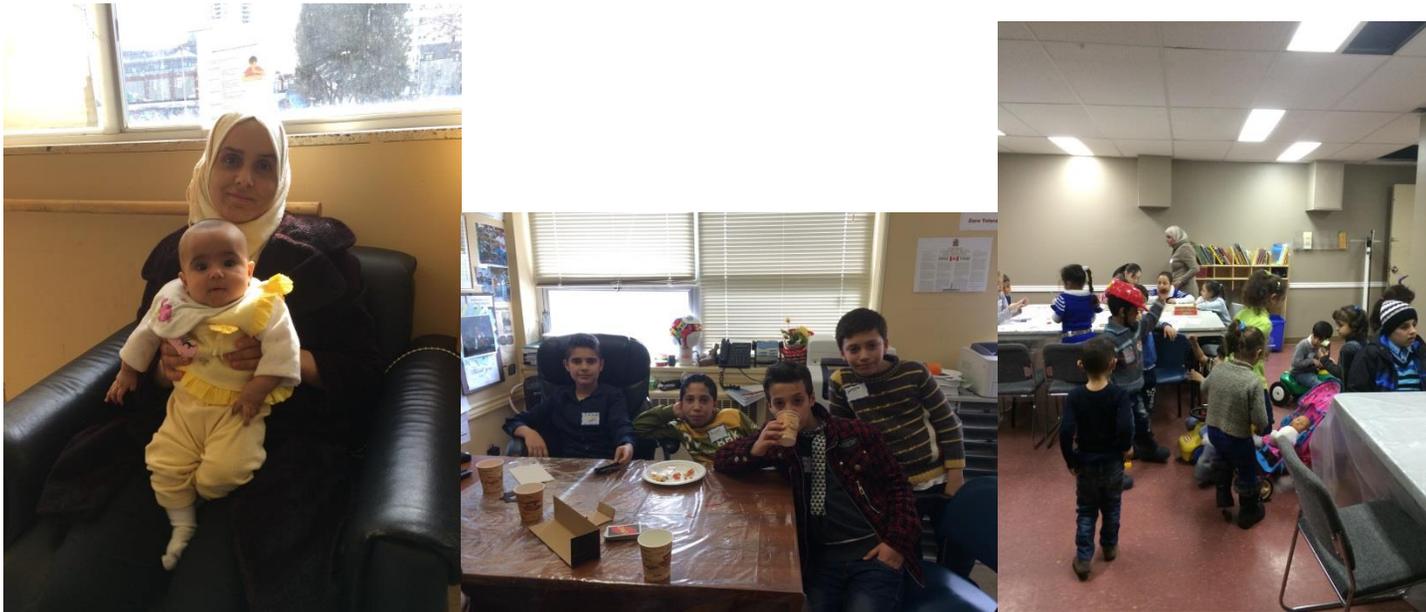


### **Oral Health Education Session**

Given the concern about poor oral health, oral disease and other severe problems related to oral health, Hamilton Urban Core conducted oral health sessions in a group setting. Attendees were given an overview of oral health services available at the Centre as well as what is covered by the government. Information about preventive oral care was provided along with personal oral health supplies.

### **Health Care in Canada Session**

Through the Health Settlement Workers at Hamilton Urban Core sessions were delivered to Syrian refugees to learn about the Canadian health care system. Participants were informed about the different types of health care providers in the community. They were given an opportunity to ask questions. Participants were given tips on how to respond to emergencies in the home. An overview of expectations of health care providers was reviewed. The session was facilitated at the Reception Center.



### **Demographics**

More than half of the Syrian refugees at Hamilton Urban Core are children under the age of 17. There is an even number of males and females and there are very few older adults (3 or 4). There are also a very low number of single adults or married couples without children. The majority are families living with both parents.

### **Issues Identified**

The Primary Health Care Nurse conducted a majority of the initial health assessments at the hotels and in the community. In a relatively short time she was able to gain people's confidence and heard about their health concerns and issues. Following are some of the issues identified that will require ongoing, focused care and support:

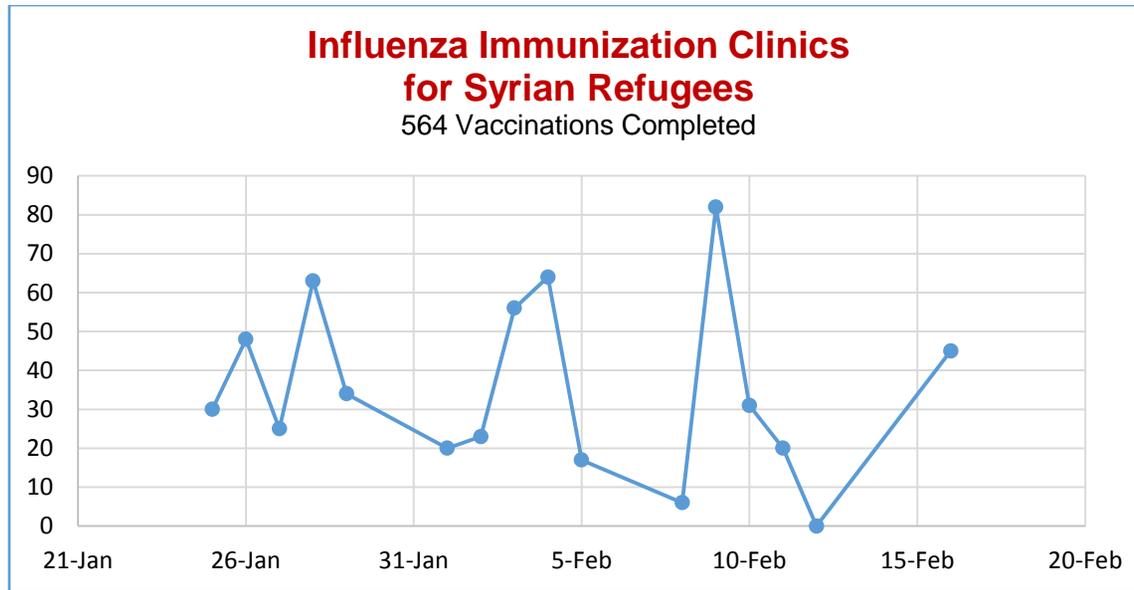
- A high incidence of dental issues for adults and children such as multiple cavities, dental pain, abnormalities due to food deficiencies, war, and other factors
- Malnutrition amongst children, calcium deficiency
- High level of diabetes and risk of diabetes due to high sugar content diet, poor diet history
- Anemia and some blood disorder, incidence of Sickle Cell Anemia
- Previous cancers, chronic health conditions, high number of men who are smokers
- Mental health concerns related to discrimination, violence, rape and sexual violence
- A large number of women with low self-esteem, low blood pressure, breast feeding for extended time due to lack of food

### **○ Services**

Hamilton Urban Core has engaged 453 Syrian refugees as clients between the period of December 2015 to May 2016. A total number of 318 have completed their initial health assessment process and the remaining 135 are scheduled or in the process of being scheduled. During this process Hamilton Urban Core also provided services for urgent situations both onsite at the Centre, at the hotels or at the Reception Center. Some of the people requiring urgent attention have been connected to other health providers who were also accepting new clients.

### **Influenza Clinic**

Hamilton Urban Core, in partnership with the Hamilton Family Health Team, coordinated and provided influenza immunization clinics for the Syrian refugees. "Flu" clinics were provided at four hotel locations to facilitate easier access. In total 564 influenza vaccinations were provided over a 16 day period.



### Accessed Services

Below are tables that represent some of the services accessed by Syrian refugees. Almost all encounters have required the use of cultural interpretation services. The Cultural Interpreters have been trained and provided in-house by Hamilton Urban Core.

Service Area	# of Service Encounters	# Clients
Primary Health Care	981	453

Other Service Areas	# of Service Encounters
Community Health Services (support)	63
Health Settlement Services (intake & orientation)	478
Early Child Development Specialist (child development)	28

Group Activities	People Attending
Welcome Tea	38
Family Saturday	100
Oral Health Education	40

○ **Other Supports**

**MacHealth DNA**

MacHealth DNA is a student-led clinic resulting from a strong partnership developed between Hamilton Urban Core, McMaster University and Hamilton Health Sciences. MacHealth DNA was actively engaged in assisting with the provision of services to the Syrian newcomers. Medical students from MacHealth DNA were included in the Centre’s triage team that provided offsite and onsite initial health screening assessments and continue to be a part of the team in providing ongoing health care services to Syrian clients.

**McMaster University Volunteers**

Arabic speaking McMaster students volunteered their time on February 20, 2016 and assisted in providing translation services during the Family Saturday event to welcome Syrian refugees to Hamilton. A total of 100 Syrian people attended this event hosted by Hamilton Urban Core.

○ **Next Steps**

Some of the next steps that Hamilton Urban Core will be implementing to support the Syrian newcomers are listed below:

- The Primary Health Care Team will closely monitor clients that have been identified as having complex health care needs to ensure that they receive the appropriate specialist services within a timely manner. The Team will also work with individuals and families to engage them in illness prevention, health maintenance and screening and health promotion, which in many cases, has not been part of the health care considerations
- Issues related to mental health and trauma are significant and range from depression and low self-esteem to anger and trauma as a result of war, violence and rape. Hamilton Urban Core will continue to explore ways in which to obtain much-needed resources to be able to provide a full range of trauma services in a culturally safe manner. At the same time and using best practices as a guide the Centre will continue to offer counseling and support, and where necessary and appropriate mental health interventions.

- Oral health care needs will be addressed by providing ongoing preventative services that include all levels of prevention, directed to the prevention of gum disease and tooth decay, especially teeth cleaning. Prevention interventions may include:
  - Primary Prevention geared towards increasing levels of good oral health and reducing oral or dental problems before they occur (e.g. education, promotion, instructions, fluoridation and pit and fissure sealant, no caries activity, etc.)
  - Secondary Prevention to prevent oral health problems through early detection and referral for early treatment of dental problems
  - Working with the appropriate dental practitioners regarding Tertiary Prevention aimed at decreasing the chances of clients developing further oral health problems, limiting of disability and restoring functional dentition (e.g. partial and full dentures, restorative and reconstructive therapy, antimicrobial and periodontal therapy etc.)
- Targeted nutrition programming will be offered to clients to provide tools on how to eat healthy and how to manage with limited resources and still maintain healthy diets. The existing diabetes education sessions and support group will be adapted to cater to the needs of the newcomers and offered to those clients identified as being at risk of having diabetes or who have been diagnosed with the disease. Support will be provided by the interdisciplinary team which includes the Primary Health Care Nurse, Dietician, Health and Wellness Counselor and Community Health Workers.
- Individual and group support will be provided on an ongoing basis by the Community Health Team. The Health Settlement Counselors, Health and Wellness Counselor, Social Worker and Community Health Workers will continue to assist the Syrian refugees as they navigate challenges that they may face as they integrate into the Hamilton community.
- The Centre will continue to assist by providing interpretation services for internal and external appointments. Ongoing active recruitment measures are in place to attract Arabic speaking people as well as the resources required to facilitate professional cultural interpretation. Overall programming aimed at encouraging Syrian newcomers to learn and practice speaking in English will also be offered.