

# IMMIGRANT MENTAL HEALTH IN NORTH CAROLINA

## A Landscape Analysis and Policy Discussion



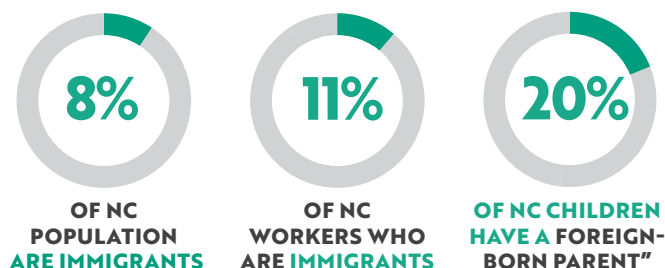
### WHY IMMIGRANT MENTAL HEALTH?

Immigrant populations can face unique challenges and stressors that impact mental well-being. Understanding and addressing these specific needs is vital to ensuring equitable mental health care and promoting well-being in diverse communities. North Carolina's immigrant population has been steadily increasing.<sup>1</sup> As our state becomes more diverse, it is important to address the mental health needs of immigrant communities now to close the existing gaps in understanding and service provision.

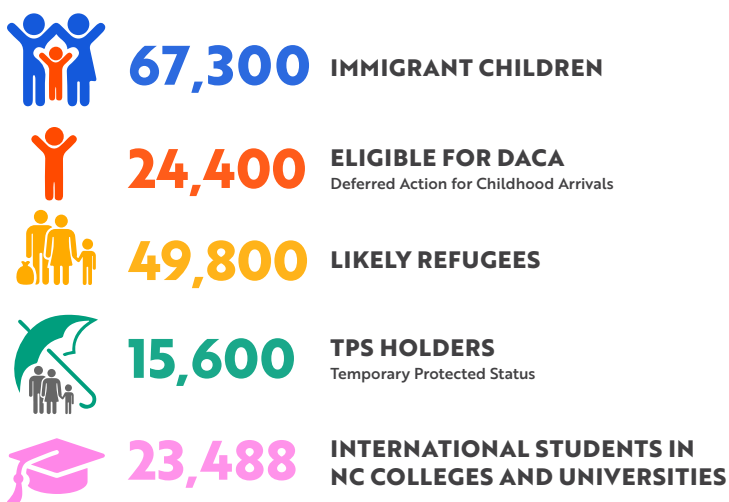
“There’s just a lot of stigma, a lot of fear. A lot of my clients tell me, ‘you know, I don’t want my family to know that I’m here talking to you.’”

–Quote from immigrant-serving clinician

### IMMIGRANTS IN NORTH CAROLINA, 2022



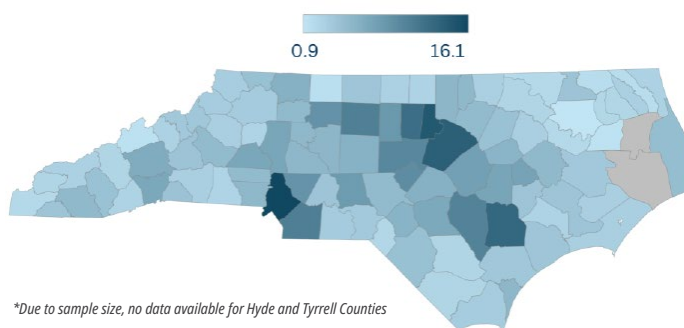
#### IN NC THERE ARE:



### LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS

A landscape analysis was conducted to explore the strengths and challenges of various immigrant groups in the state and potential opportunities to address policy issues impacting immigrant access to adequate services and supports for their mental well-being. This work was conducted through a partnership between El Futuro and the North Carolina Institute of Medicine (NCIOM) and was guided by an Advisory Council of individuals with knowledge and experience related to immigrant resources, mental health needs, and policies that influence mental health and access to care for immigrants. This work was supported by grants from the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation and the Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust.

### PERCENT FOREIGN BORN 2018-2022



Source: North Carolina Office of State Budget and Management. NC's foreign-born population increased eightfold since 1990. <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/blog/2024/02/27/ncs-foreign-born-population-increased-eightfold-1990>

### TOP LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH SPOKEN AT HOME IN NORTH CAROLINA (NUMBER OF SPEAKERS, 2022)

Spanish	802,686 speakers
Chinese (Mandarin, Cantonese)	40,611
French	32,522
Arabic	30,725
Vietnamese	26,104

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/blog/2024/02/27/ncs-foreign-born-population-increased-eightfold-1990>

# KEY THEMES

## IMMIGRANT PERSPECTIVES ON MENTAL HEALTH AND ACCESSING CARE

- **Cultural perspectives and stigma** - For many, mental health issues can be stigmatized, often viewed as a personal failing or a subject of shame rather than a treatable health condition.
- **Language related to mental health** - Different cultures will use language and metaphors related to mental health that resonate more deeply with their background.
- **Perceptions of priority** - Mental health may take a lower priority to physical health and economic needs.
- **Access and utilization barriers to formal mental health care** - Language can pose a significant challenge to accessing mental health services, as varying comfort levels with English and lack of interpreters may make it difficult to communicate symptoms effectively or understand treatment options.
- **Legal concerns and mistrust** - Concerns about immigration status - such as fear of deportation - can be a deterrent for immigrants who might otherwise seek mental health services.
- **Care through community** - Some immigrants may turn to informal methods of mental health care within their own communities, especially when formal health care systems feel inaccessible or culturally distant.

## BARRIERS TO CARE

- **Stigma** - In some cultures, mental health issues are viewed as a sign of weakness, moral failing, or spiritual affliction, leading to shame and reluctance to seek help.
- **Access to insurance** - Insurance is a critical factor in accessing mental health services, and many immigrants face significant obstacles in this area.
- **Language barriers** - It is often difficult for immigrants to find providers who speak their native language.
- **Lack of culturally competent providers** - Culturally competent providers understand the cultural context of their patients' experiences and can offer more effective and respectful care.
- **Misinformation** - Immigrants may not be aware of the mental health resources available to them or may have misconceptions about the nature and efficacy of mental health treatment.
- **Legal and logistical barriers** - Those who lack legal immigration status may fear facing deportation if they seek medical help, while others may be hesitant to use services due to concerns about privacy and the sharing of personal information.

## POTENTIAL FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT/ENFORCEMENT IN NORTH CAROLINA

Key areas for possible policy action include:

- **Payment for care** - Reimbursement rates and their relationship to interpreter services; availability of providers. availability of providers; access and eligibility for affordable health insurance benefits for all immigrants.
- **Availability of culturally competent care** - A culturally competent workforce is necessary to address the unique challenges faced by immigrant populations.

- **Funding for community health programs** - State and philanthropic funding helps support immigrant mental health programming and there are opportunities to streamline access to funding and strengthen sustainability planning.
- **Legal and logistical barriers** - This includes policies related to law enforcement interaction with immigrants, requirements for health care providers to report undocumented patients, and local transportation policies that improve public transit options that can either mitigate or exacerbate stress and anxiety for immigrants.
- **Education and outreach** - Public awareness campaigns about mental health and available services can reduce stigma and inform immigrants about how to seek help. Schools and community centers can be leveraged as sites for disseminating information and providing initial screenings or referrals.
- **Research** - There are gaps in our understanding of the need for mental health services among immigrants, preferred services and treatment strategies, and the workforce to serve the mental health needs of immigrants. Having more data on these topics can help to understand the gaps in care and develop targeted solutions.

## CONCLUSION

Findings from this landscape analysis clearly demonstrate the need for coordinated action to help address the mental health needs of immigrants in North Carolina. El Futuro and partners will continue to seek opportunities to establish an Immigrant Mental Health Solidarity Network in North Carolina and develop strategies to move toward policy solutions.

“I would love to see a world where all of our residents regardless of documentation status can access [mental health care] without any barriers, would feel comfortable accessing it where there's not fear, where there's not nervousness about it, where there's not stigma related to it. 'I'm going to seek care because I know that I need help and I don't need an interpreter to come with me. I don't need anybody else to come with me because I feel comfortable going. I feel comfortable reaching out for help.'”

*I know that we have so much work to do in this space, but wouldn't it be beautiful if we ever got to a place where we could just access [care] without being afraid, to where we can make those calls knowing that there's gonna be somebody who looks like me who understands all of me, all of my cultures, my religion, all of the background, the history of everything that I am.”*

-Interviewee from immigrant community

The full landscape analysis report can be found at:  
[ELFUTURO-NC.ORG/IMMIGRANT-SOLIDARITY-NETWORK](http://ELFUTURO-NC.ORG/IMMIGRANT-SOLIDARITY-NETWORK)