

What is the Gateway Program?

Gateway is a student-run and faculty-led initiative that aims to provide first and second-year medical students with real-world clinical experiences in refugee and newcomer health. Students gain practical skills in navigating medical communication alongside interpreters and addressing newcomer health needs in a culturally sensitive and trauma-informed manner. Medical students are trained to develop these skills under the guidance of three dedicated family physicians who help design the training content and supervise students during clinical encounters. This includes weekly Tuesday afternoon intake clinics at the Refugee Health Collaborative to practice full history taking, complete screening exams, and conduct brief physical exams at the Refugee Health Clinic (RHC). This structure ensures that students focus on building communication and cultural competence while actual patient care remains under the oversight of physicians.

Effective communication is recognized as an important element to building a trustful physician-patient relationship and is shown to improve patient outcomes. Language barriers can hinder effective clinician-patient encounters and endanger patients with misdiagnoses or adverse health outcomes. The Gateway program has enabled students to be exposed to interpretive services early in their academic journey to increase familiarity with its use and navigate building patient trust in three-way conversations.

Founded in 2005 by medical student volunteers, Gateway has significantly enhanced exposure to refugee and newcomer health. The program has grown to involve medical students, family physicians, global health faculty, and the Association for New Canadians (ANC). Collaborations have included Lunch & Learn sessions, which are opportunities for medical students to promote healthy living through presentations to newcomers at the ANC Adult Language School. The Gateway Program has also been presented at several conferences.

Refugee versus Immigrant:

Refugee – an individual who has had to forcefully leave their home country seeking safety and basic human needs. This may be due to war, violence, extreme poverty, natural disasters, or political turmoil. A refugee is not the same as an immigrant.

- Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) – an individual who is referred by the UNHCR or another referral organization and supported by the Canadian government for up to 1 year.
- Privately Sponsored Refugees (PSRs) – an individual who is supported financially by a private entity or organization to live in Canada for at least 1 year.
- Blended Visa Office-Referral Program (BVOR) – refugees identified by the UNHCR and resettled to Canada with shared support through 6 months of income from the government and 6 months of income plus 12 months of social support from private sponsors

- Protected Persons and Convention Refugees – an individual already in Canada with a well-founded fear of persecution and is awaiting a refugee claim.

Refugees can benefit from government programs, including

- Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP): provides temporary health coverage
- Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP): provides financial government assistance for one year

Immigrant – an individual who voluntarily immigrates to Canada for work, education, family, or other factors. Immigrants can apply through different streams such as Express Entry, Family Sponsorship, or Provincial Nominee Programs.

Resources:

There are many resources to learn more about refugee and newcomer health, some of which are highlighted below:

1. Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP)
 - a. The Newcomer Health Hub – [Interim Federal Health Program: A Primer](#)
 - b. Government of Canada – [Interim Federal Health Program: What is covered](#)
2. Canadian Pediatric Society – [Kids New to Canada](#)
3. UNHCR – [Refugee resettlement to Canada](#)
4. Association for New Canadians – [New to Canada](#)
5. Canadian Collaboration For Immigrant And Refugee Health – [Building Leaders For Global Health](#)
6. [Clinical Guidelines for Refugee and Newcomer Care](#)