

# Haitian Newcomer Health Profile

## FACT SHEET

### Background

#### Geography, history, and origins

The Republic of Haiti borders the Dominican Republic and is located on the western part of Hispaniola, a large island between the Caribbean Sea and North Atlantic Ocean.<sup>24</sup> Haiti is a tropical mountainous country populated with over 11.5 million people.<sup>4</sup>



Haiti has a history of early Spanish and French colonization (1400s – 1800s). In 1804, the country won independence from France through the Haitian Revolution. Haiti is the second oldest and first Black republic nation in the western hemisphere.<sup>21, 24</sup>

#### Culture, religious beliefs, family, and education

Haitians are resilient and have a rich culture and society, including a strong sense of community, hospitality, and respect for family and elders.<sup>14</sup> It is common to see Haitian families in multigenerational households, which can provide support and positively impact physical and emotional wellbeing.<sup>9, 15, 27</sup>

Haitian culture is influenced by African, European, and Latin American traditions. In Haiti, the population is 52% non-Catholic Christians, 35% Catholic, 11% non-religious, and 2% Vodouist.<sup>35</sup> Vodou is a traditional African spiritual religion. Many Haitians incorporate elements of Vodou with other religious beliefs and traditions. Some practitioners of Vodou utilize natural herbal remedies and spiritual rituals in addition to western medicine to support their health.<sup>1</sup>

There are many different languages spoken in Haiti, including Haitian Creole, French, Spanish and English. Most Haitians speak Haitian Creole and French, the official languages of the country.<sup>7</sup>

While Haitians highly value education, their education system has struggled with quality and accessibility, in part due to the shortage of qualified teachers and resources. More than 80% of schools in Haiti are privately run and unaffordable. This results in a low primary school enrollment rate (57%) and an adult literacy rate of 62%.<sup>26, 28</sup> Additional barriers to education include health crises and armed violence.<sup>10, 28</sup>

## Resettlement

Since the 1950s, Haitians have resettled in the U.S. for various reasons, including political instability, human rights violations, poor economic conditions, increasing violence, and natural disasters (earthquakes, hurricanes, etc.).<sup>10, 16, 18</sup>

In 2010, a major earthquake struck Haiti, causing over 217,000 deaths and more than 1.5 million people to become homeless. Since then, Haiti has struggled to rebuild and many Haitians have sought refuge in other countries, primarily North and South America.<sup>18</sup> The number of Haitian immigrants in the U.S. rose by 24% from 2010 to 2022.<sup>16</sup> Today, Haiti's humanitarian situation has worsened due to governmental collapse, economic recession, inflation, and escalation of gang violence. About 90% of Haiti's population lives in poverty.<sup>10</sup>

In Minnesota, Haitians make up a small community of around 2,000 people, primarily located in the Twin Cities and parts of southern Minnesota.<sup>40</sup> A non-profit organization in Minneapolis, Haitian Community of Minnesota, provides aid to Haitians in Minnesota and Haiti. The Haitian Community of Minnesota provides services such as immigration and citizenship assistance, educational and cultural arts programs, and child care, food, and translation services.

## Health care access

In Haiti, people struggle to access health care due to lack of funding, health care workers, and basic services. Health needs are high among the population due to exposure to displacement and violence (including in health care facilities), and infectious disease outbreaks.<sup>10</sup> Due to how different the Haitian and U.S. health care systems are, it is important that Haitian newcomers are provided education and orientation to the U.S. health care system, including insurance, potential costs, and what to expect at visits.

## Health concerns

Haiti has an ongoing public health crisis, including high numbers of malnourished children (under 5 years of age), multiple health outbreaks (including cholera and other waterborne diseases), and low vaccination coverage.<sup>10</sup> In 2022, childhood vaccination coverage (for diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis [DTP], hepatitis B, Bacillus Calmette-Guerin [BCG], Haemophilus influenzae type b [Hib], polio, and measles & rubella [MR] vaccines) was between 41 to 75%.<sup>38</sup> In 2022, only 2% of Haitians were reported as being fully vaccinated for COVID-19 and 4% had received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.<sup>11</sup>

In Haiti, communicable diseases include dengue, zika, hantavirus, hepatitis A and B, rabies, typhoid, cholera, parasitic diseases, malaria, multi-drug resistant tuberculosis (MDR-TB), yellow fever, HIV/AIDS,

and leptospirosis, which are all uncommon in the U.S.<sup>6</sup> Notable non-communicable diseases and health concerns within the Haitian population include heart disease (ischemic and hypertensive), diabetes type 2, kidney disease, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).<sup>36</sup> Studies show Haitian immigrant populations have an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, cervical cancer, and human papillomavirus (HPV).<sup>12, 13</sup> Contributing factors to this disparity include lack of access to resources, education, and health services.<sup>20</sup>

## Mental health

Mental health is a concern among Haitian newcomers to the U.S., as this population has been found to experience high levels of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other mental health problems.<sup>3, 8</sup> Contributing factors may include acculturation, language barriers, lack of supportive social networks, pre-migration experiences, and harsh migration journeys, in addition to trauma experienced in Haiti.<sup>2, 39</sup>

Haitian newcomers may benefit from connections with Haitian and faith communities and culturally appropriate mental health screening and treatment.<sup>37</sup>

## Pathways and visa status

Haitians may arrive to the U.S. through various pathways. The following are ways in which a Haitian national may be classified as an entrant and therefore eligible for the benefits described below.<sup>22</sup>

- **Humanitarian parole (INA 212(d)(5))**, does not matter if parole has expired
- **Conditional parole (INA 236)** with no other acquired status AND no final order of removal
- **In removal proceedings** (under INA 212 or expedited removal under INA 235) AND no final order of removal
- **Pending asylum** applications with DHS AND no final order of removal

Due to the myriad of pathways through which Haitians arrive to the U.S., the Minnesota Department of Health does not receive overseas medical information for this population. Haitians in Minnesota are often referred for the refugee health assessment by private sponsors, resettlement agencies, and local public health departments. The Minnesota Department of Health Refugee Health Program will determine if an individual is eligible for the refugee health assessment.

## Eligibility

Immigration status impacts eligibility for benefits. The following groups are Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) benefit eligible:

- **Asylees**<sup>30</sup>
- **Haitian entrants**<sup>22</sup>
  - A citizen or national of Haiti who:
    - Entered the U.S. as a parolee, or
    - In removal proceedings, or
    - Has an application for asylum pending, AND

- Does NOT have a final, non-appealable, and legally enforceable order of removal, deportation, or exclusion.<sup>32</sup>
- **Refugees<sup>33</sup>**

**Individuals must meet all eligibility criteria to receive benefits.**

## Benefits

- **Matching grant:** Alternative to cash assistance. Contact a local resettlement agency listed on [MN Department of Human Services: The Matching Grant Program \(www.dhs.state.mn.us/main/idcplg?IdcService=GET\\_DYNAMIC\\_CONVERSION&RevisionSelectionMethod=LatestReleased&dDocName=cm\\_002939\)](#) to apply.
- **Medical assistance (Minnesota Medicaid) or MinnesotaCare: Health insurance**
  - Free MNSure navigators help complete MNSure applications: [MNSure Assister Directory \(www.mnsure.org/help/find-assister/find-assister.jsp\)](#). Most ORR-eligible individuals are eligible for medical assistance.
- **Refugee health assessment:** Special medical appointment for people who have recently arrived in the U.S. Health requirements such as tuberculosis testing and immunizations may be completed during the refugee health assessment.<sup>34</sup>
  - **Referrals:** [New Arrival Notification and Screening Referral \(https://redcap.health.state.mn.us/redcap/surveys/?s=P3NXK8W9P7NJFD39\)](#) form.
  - Learn more at [Refugee Health Community Partners and Sponsors \(www.health.state.mn.us/communities/rih/partners/index.html\)](#).
  - Questions may be directed to [refugeehealth@state.mn.us](mailto:refugeehealth@state.mn.us) or 651-201-5414.
- **Refugee medical assistance (RMA):** Up to 12 months of medical coverage for ORR-eligible individuals who are ineligible for medical assistance (Minnesota Medicaid). Most ORR-eligible individuals in Minnesota qualify for medical assistance.<sup>20</sup> Find additional information at [MN DHS: Refugee programs - Health care \(https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/adults/services/refugee-assistance/#3\)](#).
- **Services through the Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) Resettlement Network, including:**
  - Employment services
  - Family assisters: work with families to resolve immediate needs and connect them to community resources to strengthen wellbeing.
  - Family coaches: provide long-term support to encourage progress towards multi-step academic and integration goals for students and youth.
  - Immigration services
  - Refugee cash assistance: cash assistance for up to 12 months after U.S. arrival.<sup>19</sup>
  - Community orientation workshops

- Contact information for agencies providing Resettlement Network services may be found at [MN DHS: Refugee Resettlement Network Agency Contact List \(https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/adults/services/refugee-assistance/resettlement-programs-office-agency-contract-list/\)](https://mn.gov/dhs/people-we-serve/adults/services/refugee-assistance/resettlement-programs-office-agency-contract-list/).
- Questions regarding Resettlement Network Services may be directed to [dhs.rpo.outreach@state.mn.us](mailto:dhs.rpo.outreach@state.mn.us).

Eligibility for state-funded benefits varies by benefit type. Individuals should contact their local benefits office to inquire about eligibility for programs such as Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP)/Diversionary Work Program (DWP), general assistance for people with disabilities, and SNAP for people over age 50: [MN DHS: County and Tribal Nation offices \(https://mn.gov/dhs/general-public/about-dhs/contact-us/county-and-tribal-nation-offices/\)](https://mn.gov/dhs/general-public/about-dhs/contact-us/county-and-tribal-nation-offices/).

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