

Advocacy for Child Migrants: University of California Health Systems' Response to a Humanitarian Crisis

Problem Statement: Unaccompanied children seeking safety migrated across the southern border of the US in early 2021.

Background: More than 50,000 unaccompanied children crossed the southern border of the US in early 2021, exceeding the capacity of pre-existing shelters. The US Department of Health and Human Services extended an urgent call to address this humanitarian crisis to potential partners including University of California (UC) academic health centers.

Methods: The University of California Office of the President (UCOP) extended an urgent request to all UC academic centers. Family Medicine Chairs and system leaders coordinated efforts within their units to recruit faculty, staff and trainees. Participation was voluntary. Faculty were expected to contribute administrative time, nights or weekends so the services for migrants would not reduce access to care for local patients. Residents were invited to join for electives in child refugee health.

Outcomes: Family Medicine and Pediatrics Chairs were among the first to respond to the call. Within one month, more than 500 UC faculty, staff and trainees had volunteered. UCSD faculty and staff provided health care services including rapid assessments and urgent care for more than 1200 child migrants in San Diego. UCLA, UCI and the Children's Hospital of Orange County (CHOC) provided services for more than 800 children in Long Beach. Faculty of UCSF and UCD contributed through development of training modules, organization of resident electives.

The UC system activated faculty, staff and trainees to organize a system-wide response to provide health care for unaccompanied child migrants.

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