

REFUGEE & IMMIGRANT SERVICES NORTHWEST

Empowering Self-sufficiency and Wellbeing



Refugee & Immigrant Services Northwest (RISNW) is a refugee-led, community-based nonprofit serving refugee, immigrant and migrant communities in Snohomish, Skagit, and Whatcom Counties. Founded in 1977 to originally serve newly arrived Southeast Asian refugees, their mission has since evolved to help refugees, immigrants, migrants and other under-resourced communities achieve their potential to become self-sufficient, healthy, contributing members of society.

RISNW is one of the ten contracted partners of the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) under the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [OT21-2103 COVID-19 Health Disparities Grant](#) which ensures equitable access to COVID-19 information, vaccines, and prevention resources among disproportionately impacted communities while addressing the social determinants of health.

When the COVID -19 vaccine became available during the height of the pandemic, RISNW was among the first to organize BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color) community leaders to form the Vaccine Equity Partnership in Snohomish County. Through the tenacious efforts led by Van Dinh Kuno, this collaboration has increased access to COVID-19 vaccinations, education, and outreach for underserved communities through regular and accessible vaccine clinics at community sites. RISNW continues to collaborate with the Vaccine Equity Partnership, currently called Equity Partnership of Snohomish County.

Audience

Now, as part of the health disparities grant, RISNW continues collaborating with institutional and community-rooted organizations to ensure the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (NHPI) communities receive up-to-date and culturally relevant COVID-19 health information and resources.

Key Implementation Strategies

Using culture to create effective health messaging for NHPI communities, RISNW is:

- Conducting community listening sessions
- Developing materials to advance vaccine access equity including original music and lyrics.
- Creating a music-video focused on the importance of COVID-19 vaccination among younger Pacific Islanders including Marshallese, Tongan, Fijian, Chuukese, Samoan and Papuan. (The song chorus includes “Let’s Vaccinate! Let’s Vaccinate! Let’s stop COVID-19” and is in the reggae-style which is popular among islanders)
- Distributing personal protective equipment (PPE) to community members such, as N-95 masks, hand sanitizers, as well as COVID test kits.



Partnerships

The organization’s key partners include: Oye Media & Communications, PICA WA. Snohomish County Public Health District, Providence DOH Care-A-Van and Birds Eye Medica

Post-pandemic, the organization continues to provide basic need services, employment support, and health resources to ensure the diverse communities they support are resilient and connected. One example of support the organization provides is the provisioning of resources to help navigate the US healthcare and health insurance systems. Access to healthcare is an important aspect of the social determinants of health. Outreach has helped address social and economic inequities such as transportation barriers to accessing healthcare.

“ People will remember a song, paper will just get tossed away

-Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander Listening Session Participant.

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Within DOH, the effort to sustain the partnership with RISNW is led by the Community Investments and Engagement (CI&E) Branch team within the Center for Community Relations and Equity (CRE). Funding from the CDC [Health Disparities Grant](#) supports partners like Refugee & Immigrant Services Northwest through the [Community-Driven Outreach \(CDO\) Initiative](#). The CDO Initiative aims to improve equitable access to COVID-19 information, vaccines and prevention resources among communities disproportionately impacted and to help these communities build their capacity for future emergencies.