

Creating a Safe Space at your Health Center

Last updated by the Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations (AAPCHO) on September 18, 2017.

- 1) Health centers and other places of care have some protection under the “Sensitive Locations” [Memo](#), which designates “Medical treatment and health care facilities, such as hospitals, doctors’ offices, accredited health clinics, and emergent or urgent care facilities” as places where enforcement should be avoided unless exigent circumstances exist or prior approval is granted. Keep a copy of this policy on-hand. *In general, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are told to avoid enforcement actions at or seeming to intimidate sensitive locations.*
- 2) While health centers are open to all who need care, it is possible to afford patients even greater privacy by converting more areas of the health center into “private” spaces. Two suggestions are to:
 - a. Via signage, designate the waiting area as open to only patients and the relatives or friends accompanying them. See example [here](#).
 - b. Require people to sign in to ensure their visit has a medical purpose.
- 3) Designate a staff member(s) to manage any encounters with immigration or law enforcement officers. These persons can be trained in what to do if ICE or law enforcement enters a facility, how to manage patients in a culturally competent manner, and to know the rights of patients and the center (to examine and verify a warrant, for example). AAPCHO will be planning a webinar on this in the coming weeks, and our partners at the National Immigration Law Center also have this [explainer](#).
- 4) Train intake, front desk or outreach staff to have a plan-of-action in the event of ICE encounters. Keep necessary contact info for designated staff members, local legal CBOs, and paperwork designating the health center as a sensitive location and private space.
- 5) Post signage welcoming and reassuring patients in areas, such as waiting rooms.
- 6) Have resources available for patients such as [“Know Your Rights” cards](#) in AA&NHPI languages, [information](#) on making a Family Preparedness Plan to ensure any medical issues continue to remain addressed, and immigrant lawyers [locally](#).
- 7) Work with providers to include check-ins about mental health and stress, especially for patients potentially scared about immigration status. Our upcoming [webinar](#) will cover mental health of immigrants and refugees, and the American Academy of Physicians has a [guide](#) for supporting the needs of immigrant children.
- 8) Address patient fears of enrollment and renewal concerns. We have been hearing from several centers that patients are missing appointments and fearing continued use of Medicaid and other benefits. Sample talking points about the continued stability of health insurance and other benefits is available [here](#).
- 9) As an organization, connect with local legal aid providers, immigrant rights advocates, and other groups who may have information and ongoing knowledge of local efforts, issues and resources. If you are unable to, please reach out to us at policy@aapcho.org, and we can try to connect you with local chapters of national organizations.