

Paths to Healing

Healthcare Access for Immigrant Survivors in Houston

How do immigration enforcement fears affect survivors' access to healthcare, and what can providers do now?

“ We’re putting our patients in a place where they’re debating: Is it worth it to pick up my medication?

SOCIAL SERVICE PROVIDER

Provider Observations



Fear before arrival

Survivors may avoid leaving home, driving, or entering clinics because of perceived enforcement risk.



Getting to the clinic

Some patients must weigh whether medication, procedures, or follow-up appointments are worth the risk of getting there.



Privacy concerns

Providers heard concerns about where personal information goes and whether it could be used against patients.



Eligibility questions

Patients may assume they cannot receive services without legal status, ID, income proof, or address proof.

Healthcare Provider Example

A provider described a patient circling the clinic after seeing a security guard and becoming afraid that entering could expose her to immigration enforcement.

Fear was a factor in her trip to the clinic, her entrance into the clinic, and her decision to pursue healthcare.

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Provider interviews

Houston

Provider voices

Mar-Apr

2026 interviews

Healthcare

Access + safety

Building Trust in Healthcare Access

Next steps for clinics, hospitals, social service providers, and community partners serving immigrant survivors

1. Minimize documentation requests

Before asking for immigration status, country of origin, proof of ID, proof of income, or proof of address, staff should confirm whether the information is actually required. If it is not required, do not ask for it. If it is required, explain why the question is being asked, how the information will be used, and whether the patient is required to answer.

Clearly inform patients what is needed to receive healthcare services, what is optional, and what is only used for financial assistance.

2. Explain confidentiality before asking sensitive questions

Staff should explain confidentiality, information-sharing practices, and patient options in easily understood language. Patients should know what information stays within the clinic, what may be shared for referrals or benefits, and when consent is needed.

Post these policies in waiting rooms, exam rooms, intake areas, websites, and patient portals in multiple languages.

3. Make rights and eligibility information easier to find

Survivors may assume they are not eligible for medical care, financial assistance, specialty referrals, food support, or follow-up services because of immigration status. Clinics and partner organizations should clearly explain service eligibility, financial assistance options, patient rights, and referral pathways in multiple languages.

Share information through clinic handouts, social media, community centers, schools, faith spaces, and trusted community members.

4. Reduce travel barriers

For survivors, getting to an appointment may involve fear of traffic stops, police contact, or public visibility. Support safer transportation through ride-share support, transit vouchers, parking assistance, telehealth, flexible scheduling, medication delivery, and follow-up calls.

5. Bring access beyond the clinic

Offer resource access through mobile clinics, legal aid partners, social service agencies, cultural organizations, schools, and faith-based partners. Trusted community spaces can make it easier for survivors to ask questions, understand their options, and connect with support.

6. Train staff and build referral relationships

Staff should receive trauma-informed, immigrant-sensitive training on how fear, documentation requests, law enforcement visibility, and language barriers affect patient decisions to seek healthcare. Clinics should also build referral relationships with social service and legal organizations so patients can be connected quickly and safely.

Examples: Tahirih Justice Center, Physicians for Human Rights, Houston Immigration Legal Services Collaborative, Texas Immigration Law Council, and other local legal aid and social service partners.