



Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative Phase IIA Report

Summary

Following the success of Phase I of the Boston Immigrant Covid-19 Collaborative, the Collaborative remained true to its core mission while expanding and evolving to support the ongoing urgent needs of diverse immigrant communities. During Phase IIA, the Collaborative was renamed to the Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative and invited four new partner organizations, Metrowest Worker Center, Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores, New North Citizens Council and Pioneer Valley Workers Center. As the Covid-19 surge moved beyond Greater Boston and life for most people began to normalize, the Collaborative's focus shifted from providing immediate relief to immigrant families to providing a path to recovery. This report details the efforts of the Collaborative during Phase IIA.

Concluding Phase I

The Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative was formed during the Covid-19 pandemic with guidance from the Boston Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement and with lead funding from the Boston Resiliency Fund. 11 nonprofit organizations came together to address immigrant families' most urgent needs in a time of crisis by providing direct financial relief and other resources for those not eligible for government support. From April 13 through May 31, the Collaborative served more than 20,000 immigrants.

Phase IIA

As the Covid-19 pandemic continued, the need continued to grow. Understanding there would be long-term effects on immigrant communities due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Collaborative began to chart a strategic plan that looked beyond the most immediate needs to the path to recovery for immigrant families.

Diverse populations of immigrant families in Massachusetts have been especially vulnerable during this crisis as they work in frontline jobs in healthcare, food services, retail, tourism, construction, cleaning services, domestic work. Many immigrants continued to be out of work because of economic shutdowns and for those in essential roles that could work, their hours may have been reduced or they may have contracted Covid-19 and do not have access to sick time. Meanwhile, their children are at home without access to meals that the schools provide and with limited access to tools for learning. Each day, the bills continue to mount and the burden to provide for themselves and their families becomes heavier. Their situations have become dire. The financial gap these families need to fill continues to broaden as the waiting lists for those in need of support continues to grow.

Many families are undocumented and not eligible to receive unemployment benefits or any form of government relief. They need immediate support for basic needs such as groceries, food, pharmacy products, diapers, utilities, hygiene products, childcare and rent. A [new survey by the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition](#) reinforces the urgent issues facing undocumented immigrants in Massachusetts as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Of the respondents that were undocumented or in mixed status households:

- 84% reported at least one job loss in the household
- 15% said lack of childcare had forced them to stop working

- 82% did not receive unemployment
- 45% are behind on their rent.

To address these needs, the Collaborative continued its efforts in Phase II including to:

- Move beyond emergency relief to short-term recovery.
- Provide coordination among immigrant support groups, develop best practices and build capacity.
- Be the lens for equity, address disparities and be an authentic voice for the marginalized.
- Identify emerging trends and needs, for example there are serious emerging needs around how this crisis is impacting the mental health with immigrant families due to trauma and isolation.
- Strengthen the resiliency safety net of the City of Boston.

Throughout Phase I, it became clear that there was a need to support immigrant families beyond the city of Boston. The Collaborative invited Metrowest Worker Center/Casa del Trabajador/Casa do Trabalhador in Framingham, Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores in New Bedford, New North Citizens in Springfield and Pioneer Valley Workers Center in Northampton to join the 11 existing partner organizations. The Collaborative was renamed to the Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative to reflect this expanded mission.

Funding for Phase IIA was provided by the Open Societies Foundation (OSF) with a grant totaling \$600,000 for the period from May 18, 2020 through November 16, 2020. 60% of the funding went directly to families and 40% of the funding went to capacity-building. Each organization received \$20,000 for direct cash assistance to families and \$14,000 for capacity building. Eight organizations received \$1,500 for employee well-being programs. Three organizations received \$8,000 for bulk food supplies. Emergency funds were set aside for external requests. Funds were also utilized for operational support.



During Phase IIA, the immigrant community's needs remained urgent. As in Phase I, each organization continued to have a waiting list of families in need and the Collaborative received external referrals through the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement, the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition and other organizations. Cash assistance was provided to families in amounts ranging from \$50 to \$1,000 depending on need.

When one member of the Rian Immigrant Center delivered a check for \$500 to a family stating, “this is just a little gift from the Center,” the father replied, “nothing is too little.” This man faced many challenges. He had been out of work for nearly five months, his wife was undergoing chemotherapy and he had two children to care for.

Agencia Alpha reported that 80% of the people we have helped with financial assistance either had Covid-19 or had a family member who had it. For example, in a family of five, both parents were Covid-19 positive as well as their three children ages 16, four and one. In another family, all four members tested positive and the father passed away due to Covid-19. Centro Presente has a waiting list of 300 people seeking financial support. 90% of the people the organization helps are women. The families that Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center support are facing serious financial struggles as many of their restaurant businesses are suffering or closing. Stigmas associated with Chinatown have devastated the local economy. The Immigrant Family Services Institute relayed the story of a medical doctor from Haiti who feels embarrassed that he cannot work in his field in the United States because of his status and earn for his family. While Boston International Newcomers Academy navigates virtual learning and the digital divide, a bright, young alumnus died from Covid-19.



In addition, the need for food assistance remains strong as Agencia Alpha sees 650 families per week through its emergency food distribution. A man walks four miles to the Brazilian Worker Center’s weekly food pantry because that is the only access he has to food. The Caribbean Youth Center’s pantry sees mostly women who are seeking access to personal hygiene supplies. Women who cannot afford groceries likely cannot afford sanitary napkins, tampons and other necessary supplies.

For more stories, please see page 5.

Building Sustainability for the Collaborative

With more understanding of the disease and its spread yet still so much uncertainty, the Collaborative began to shift its mission from direct relief to a road to recovery. It began to think beyond the immediate needs of immigrant families by discussing longer-term solutions that would be more impactful and more sustainable. The partner organizations contemplated what the “new normal” would look like for immigrant families and how they could best support them.

While direct relief to families remained a top priority, the Collaborative began to build capacity for the future. To start, it formed two subcommittees. The Trends & Thought Leadership subcommittee is intended to discern pressing issues facing immigrant communities that inform advocacy efforts. Topics discussed include pending legislation such as the Driver’s License Bill and the Safe Communities Act, the 2020 Census, Black Lives Matter, the eviction moratorium and the digital divide. The Coordination & Capacity Building subcommittee is intended to convene, organize, fundraise, build capacity and oversee governance of the Collaborative. This includes hiring a program manager and a communications expert, gaining synergy by connecting with other relevant organizational networks, fundraising and overseeing fiduciary responsibilities and managing governance and decision-making processes. The Collaborative created a job description for a Program Manager, hiring Luiza Souza to run operations in tandem with the Steering Committee. The Collaborative also hired a communications consultant to manage the communications strategy including media relations, social media, reporting and professional development for the partner organizations.

Conclusion

In Phase IIA, the Collaborative provided more than 4,000 individuals with financial assistance and more than 4,300 individuals with bulk food assistance, impacting hundreds of families across the Commonwealth. The Collaborative has served more than 35,000 immigrants since the pandemic began, meeting the most urgent need in the immigrant community and supporting some of Massachusetts’ most vulnerable residents. Though the struggle is far from over, tens of thousands of immigrants received essential support to remain in their homes and to provide meals for their families. The Collaborative is grateful to the Open Societies Foundation for its funding of Phase IIA, which allowed it to continue to provide the most basic needs to immigrants with dignity and respect. The funding also allowed the diverse set of organizations to begin to

build capacity for the future, drawing on the strength of the partner organizations that are equipped to do this essential work strategically, efficiently and with cultural understanding.



Immigrant Stories during Covid-19

A mother on her own with an extremely ill teenager

A woman who was married with two children faces dire circumstances. Her husband left her for another woman. The mother lost her job due to the pandemic. And her 16-year-old son contracted Covid-19 and suffered for two months in the hospital on a respirator. Now, he has serious damage to his lungs and his liver. With the lack of income and mounting medical bills, the family struggles to buy food.

An influenza like illness puts a mother out of work

A 37-year-old mother and aunt arrived in the US from Central America in 2017 with three kids, her two sons and her nephew now ages 18, 12 and 17. The mother became very sick in March and was laid off from her job because of fears she had Covid-19. Her test results were negative, but the damage was done, and she was out of work for five months. She rents an apartment in a Boston neighborhood with three bedrooms for \$2,000 and is struggling to pay the rent.

A man who gives back

A man from Ethiopia was struggling with his rent during the pandemic. He thought his roommates were going to ask him to leave. The Collaborative provided him with some cash assistance to make ends meet. Now that he is in a better position, he has decided to volunteer weekly to provide food to families in his community.

A family of five in East Boston

The mother of a family of five in East Boston contracted Covid-19. The mother became so sick that she had to be hospitalized. The father then had to care for the eight-year-old, five-year-old and four-month-old on his own while his wife underwent five different surgeries in order to be saved.

An extended family's income collapses

A man from Central America is the oldest and acting head of household for his extended family of nine living in one apartment. The man has been in this country since 2010. Family members of working age were contributing to the rent by working as cleaners in movie theaters until the pandemic hit. Since movie theaters were closed and remained closed for months, the family has accumulated \$12,000 of debt overdue rent.

A family who had no other options

A family of five walked into the New North Citizens Welcome Center on a Thursday afternoon. The father was crying when he said, "I don't have any food for my family." This family had nowhere else to turn amid the pandemic.

A sister cares for her two brothers

A 20-year-old sister is the head of the household for her two younger brothers ages 18 and 15. This small family of siblings are on their own just outside Boston. The sister had been working at a local restaurant before the pandemic and has been able to go back to work at reduced hours, providing for her brothers who are both in school.

A non-Muslim woman visits ICNA Relief's Food Pantry

A woman facing food insecurity visited ICNA Relief's drive-thru food pantry. Although she was not Muslim, the woman addressed the volunteers by saying, "as-salamu alaykum," an Arabic greeting meaning "peace be with you." Then she started to cry because the food she received was so needed for her and her disabled father. She is just one of the many non-Muslim people who receive help, showcasing the inclusivity of the partner organizations.

A survivor of domestic violence with two children

A woman who was nine months pregnant left her home country in Central America in 2013. She crossed the border and was detained in Texas where she gave birth to her baby. Within two days of giving birth, she was sent on a bus to a sponsor in Boston. She was given a basket to carry her baby which was then taken away by immigration, prior to being dropped off at a bus station. She carried her less than week old baby in arms for the three-day journey by bus to Boston. Now settled outside of Boston, the mother recently survived a domestic violence situation and is on her own with her two kids in a one room rental. She had been working up to the pandemic, when her employer shut down the operation. She is now unemployed

and struggling with her rent. She also reports getting sick but never went to the clinic to determine if it was Covid-19.

Brothers rely on school meals

19-year-old and 18-year-old brothers arrived in the US in 2019 from Central America. The uncle who initially acted as their guardian has not provided any support. The brothers share one room in an apartment in East Boston. Because they have not been able to work, they utilize the lunches they receive through school as their main source of food.

An LGBTQ activist overstays his welcome

A 28-year-old LGBTQ activist from South America fled his native country due to persecution and torture for his activism. He is extremely resourceful but he has no family and only few connections in the Boston area. He made the long trek to the US via the southern border ending in detention in Texas for a month and was eventually sent to detention in Massachusetts where he spent nine months before winning his asylum case. When he was released, he had no local connections and nowhere to go. Luckily, he managed to find people to house him rent-free since February in a Boston neighborhood. His work permit has not been approved yet. Because of the pandemic, he feels he has overstayed his welcome and needs some financial help to rent a place of his own with a friend from detention to share the cost in an Hispanic community in the Boston area.

Parents of a special needs child

A mother and father arrived in the US from Central America less than a year ago because they felt they needed extra medical care for their five-year-old son with special needs. They had a successful bakery in their home country and had found work in the US before the pandemic. Now, they are both out of work and are struggling to pay the rent on one bedroom in an apartment in a Boston neighborhood while providing constant care for their son.

A schoolteacher

A schoolteacher and mother of two lost her job due to the pandemic and faced eviction on her apartment. Because she didn't want the eviction on her credit score, she broke her lease, assuming she would be able to find a new apartment. Unfortunately, she was not able to and has been living in her car with her daughters.

A mother forced to flee two countries

A mother was not intending to flee to the US. She left her home country in Central America with a two-year-old. If she had stayed, she would likely have been killed. She fled to Mexico and was in the process of applying for status rather than the US, but she was tracked down by her home country nightmare and was forced to continue her flight to the US. She did not have a guide and by the time she arrived at the US border in 2018, she was also nine months pregnant. She observed groups crossing the Rio Bravo by swimming. She decided to cross without any help. She managed to swim across with her daughter pressing down on her unborn child. Once across she spent hours on the lookout for the border patrol, hoping to turn herself in, but no patrol showed up. A good samaritan found her and called the patrol, who quickly showed up. The trauma of the swim resulted in labor. Border patrol did not believe her and reluctantly took her to a hospital where she spent the next 12 hours with a complicated birth. She was discharged a couple of days later and put into a detention center for a few weeks with her newborn and toddler.

The mother is now very focused on getting her GED and hopes to work as soon as her work permit is approved. She's currently living in a rented room within an apartment outside of Boston. She considers herself lucky that no one in the apartment got sick with Covid-19. She's on her own supporting the kids.

About Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative

The Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative is formed by a diverse and multicultural range of immigrant support organizations to provide direct emergency relief to Massachusetts' most vulnerable immigrant families stemming from the COVID-19 public health crisis. The Collaborative was founded with guidance from the Boston Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement (MOIA) with lead funding from the Boston Resiliency Fund. Drawing on the strengths of community-based organizations, this model aligns with MOIA's goals while also promoting cross-collaboration and learnings that are shared efficiently across organizations.

Partner organizations include:

1. Agencia ALPHA
2. Boston Chinatown Neighborhood Center (BCNC)
3. Brazilian Worker Center
4. Caribbean Youth Club
5. Centro Comunitario de Trabajadores
6. Centro Presente
7. Boston International Newcomers Academy's Center for Collaborative Education (BINcA)
8. Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI)
9. ICNA Relief
10. Immigrant Family Services Institute (IFSI)
11. Metrowest Worker Center/Casa del Trabajador/Casa do Trabalhador
12. New North Citizens Council
13. Pioneer Valley Workers Center
14. Rian Immigrant Center
15. Sociedad Latina

The Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative promotes equity, trust, partnership and transparency in its decision-making and operations. Emergency relief is provided in alignment with these operating principles:

1. Respect for families' privacy, dignity and humanity
2. Disbursements are made easily and efficiently
3. Safety for staff and families
4. Transparency with accountability

The Rian Immigrant Center serves as the lead partner and fiscal agent to ensure efficient and transparent disbursement of funds directly to families in diverse immigrant communities and in coordination with Boston's existing food distribution operators. The steering committee is comprised of Agencia ALPHA Executive Director Patricia Sobalvarro, Brazilian Worker Center Executive Director Natálicia Tracy and Rian Immigrant Center Executive Director Ronnie Millar.

The City of Boston produced a video about the Collaborative which can be viewed [here](#).

Acknowledgements

The organizations that make up the Massachusetts Immigrant Collaborative would like to thank all the organizations' staff and volunteers for their unwavering support and commitment to immigrant families during this unprecedented health crisis. The staff and volunteers have been working tirelessly to ensure every family's needs are met whether it be moral support over the phone, listening to the struggles they are facing, helping them identify food banks, delivering groceries to homebound constituents or helping family members navigate our complex health system specially if impacted by COVID-19. The Collaborative's distribution of financial assistance and food would not be possible without the countless hours that its staff has invested in addition to the hours they spend maintaining the day-to-day needs of the organizations.

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