



Arab-American Family  
Support Center

# MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVE EVALUATION RESULTS

Examining the impact of culturally-  
responsive mental health support

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# AAFSC's MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES

The Arab-American Family Support Center (AAFSC) provides a range of culturally and linguistically competent, trauma-informed social services to support immigrants and refugees throughout New York City. While our doors are open to all, we have gained expertise serving Arab, Middle Eastern, North African, Muslim, and South Asian (AMENAMSA) communities. Across the organization, we speak 36 different languages and are representative of our client base. AAFSC initiatives operate across four priority areas – promote, prevent, get ready, and communicate – to strengthen families and communities. We promote mental and physical well-being, prevent gender-based violence and child abuse, provide the tools for learners of every age to succeed, and communicate community needs to partners and policymakers.

AMENAMSA populations are living at the intersection of poverty, racism, and trauma. They are at high risk for anxiety and depression but have difficulty accessing mental health services due to language barriers, limited education, and social stigma. In 2018, AAFSC established the Reclaiming Our Health (ROH) project in collaboration with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), Maimonides Medical Center, and community partners. This initiative brings together members of NYC's diverse immigrant communities to reimagine culturally responsive support, collaborate on outreach initiatives with the goal of reducing the stigma, and increase access to linguistically and culturally competent services.

ROH unites members of NYC's immigrant and refugee communities through workshops that destigmatize mental healthcare, create a platform for culturally specific stressors, and encourage the community to partner on innovative interventions. Through our multilingual workshops, we equip attendees to cope with stress, anxiety, and depression. Informed by tenets of the community resiliency model and mental health community advocacy training, attendees are prepared to share coping skills and information about available resources to their networks. Community advocates are trained to assist others who are struggling with trauma, discrimination, and acculturative stress, expanding the impact of our work to the sprawling networks of the community members we serve.

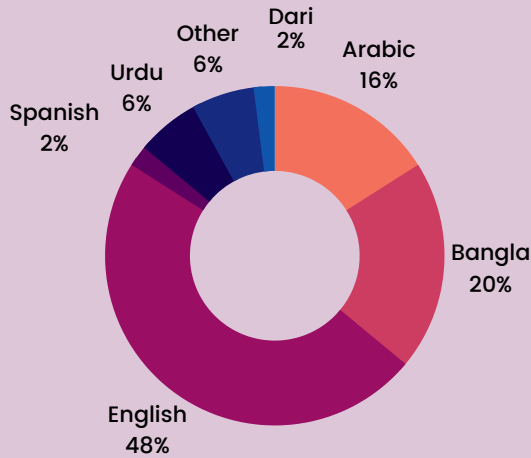
Critically, AAFSC pairs our community-level education with direct mental health counseling for individual clients. As first- and second-generation immigrants themselves, our clinicians provide unique culturally and linguistically competent support and build distinctive trust with clients. AAFSC counselors work with clients individually to maintain mental resiliency and attain long-term mental well-being. Through our trauma- and resiliency-informed trainings, all staff are equipped to identify the indicators of mental health issues and make referrals to our mental health counseling services as appropriate; this ensures community members receiving domestic violence case management support, youth enrichment programming, caregiver-child bonding support, and more – are connected to the wrap-around services needed to thrive.

Through our ongoing community needs assessments, AAFSC has observed unprecedented demand for mental health support particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. Unremitting distress caused by financial strain, isolation, anxiety, and illness is mirrored in the 350% increase in mental health counseling referrals that we witnessed in 2020. The NYC Mayor's Task Force on Immigrant Health Care Access cites inadequate cultural and linguistic competency among health care providers, lack of knowledge and understanding of care and coverage options available for immigrants, and limited awareness of language and translation services available to immigrants and health care providers as major barriers resulting in health inequities. Our programming and the cultural and linguistic competency of our staff work to address these barriers and reduce mental health disparities.

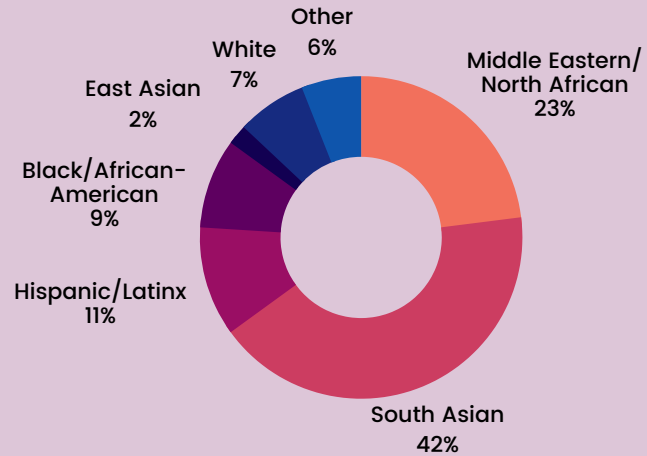


# COMMUNITY DEMOGRAPHICS

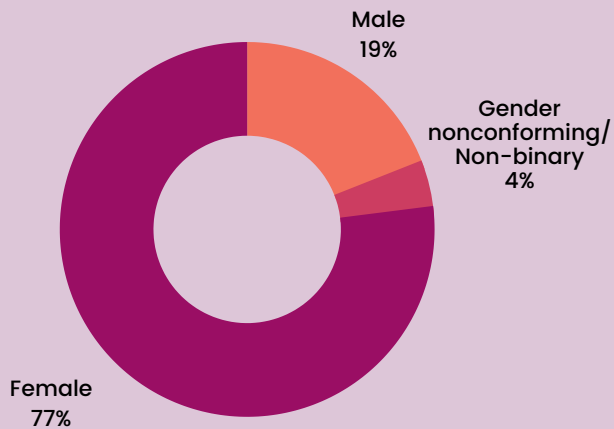
## LANGUAGE



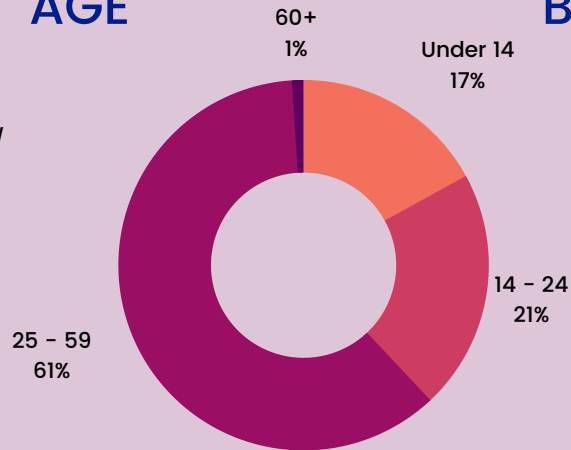
## RACE/ETHNICITY



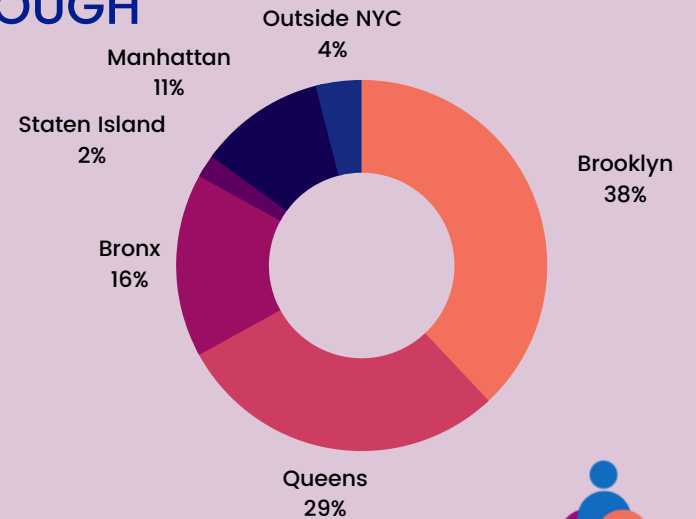
## GENDER



## AGE



## BOROUGH



# LANDSCAPE OF NEED

Results from AAFSC's Community Needs Assessment\* show unprecedented demand for mental health services since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the ongoing stigma that still deters individuals from speaking about their mental health struggles, we recognize that these figures underestimate the true need.

Percentage of incoming AAFSC clients reporting a need for mental health services



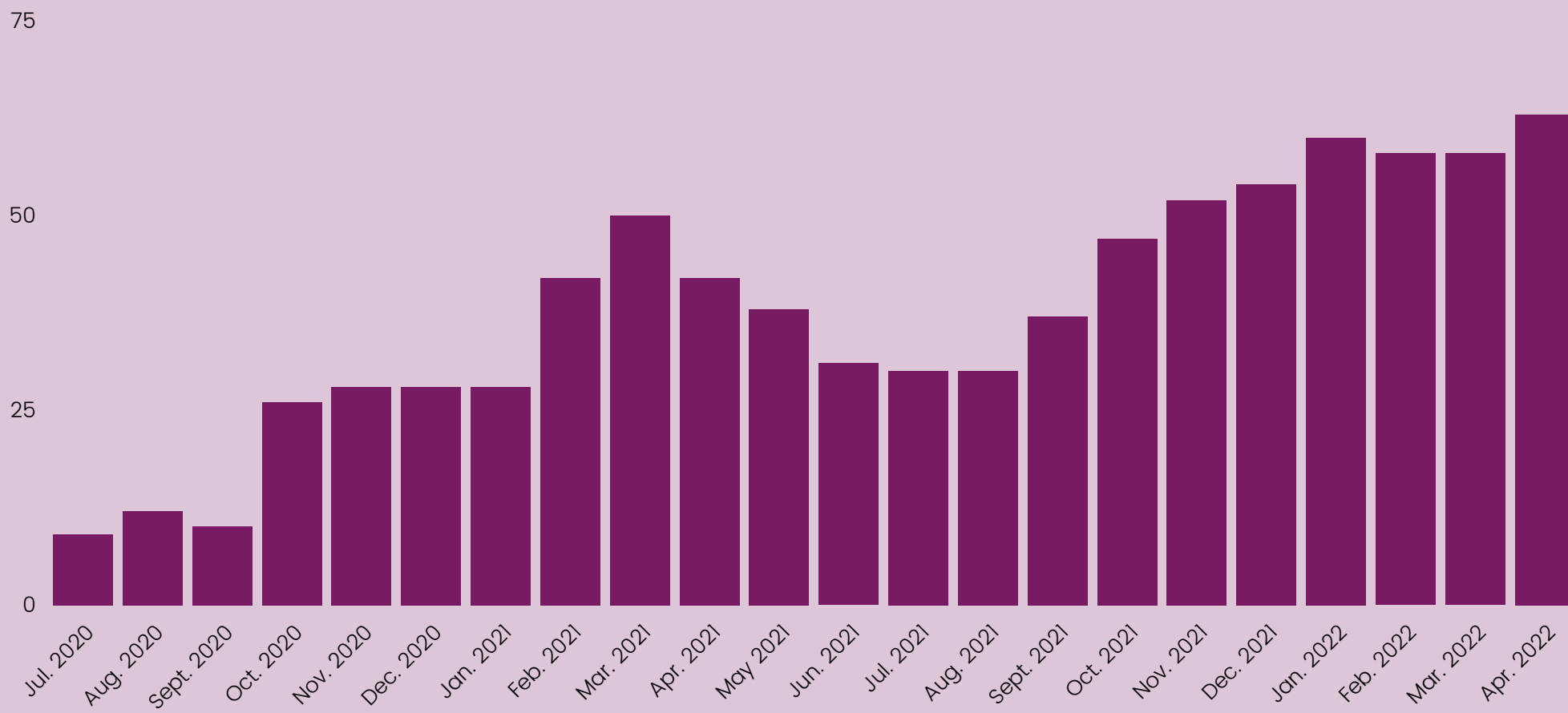
Read the full Community Needs Assessment report at [aafscny.org/our-impact](https://aafscny.org/our-impact)



# LANDSCAPE OF NEED

AAFSC's Mental Health Counseling program expanded in response to rapidly-growing need, accepting referrals from within our service network and from other service organizations. Yet, many community members still await services due to a city-wide scarcity of in-language providers.

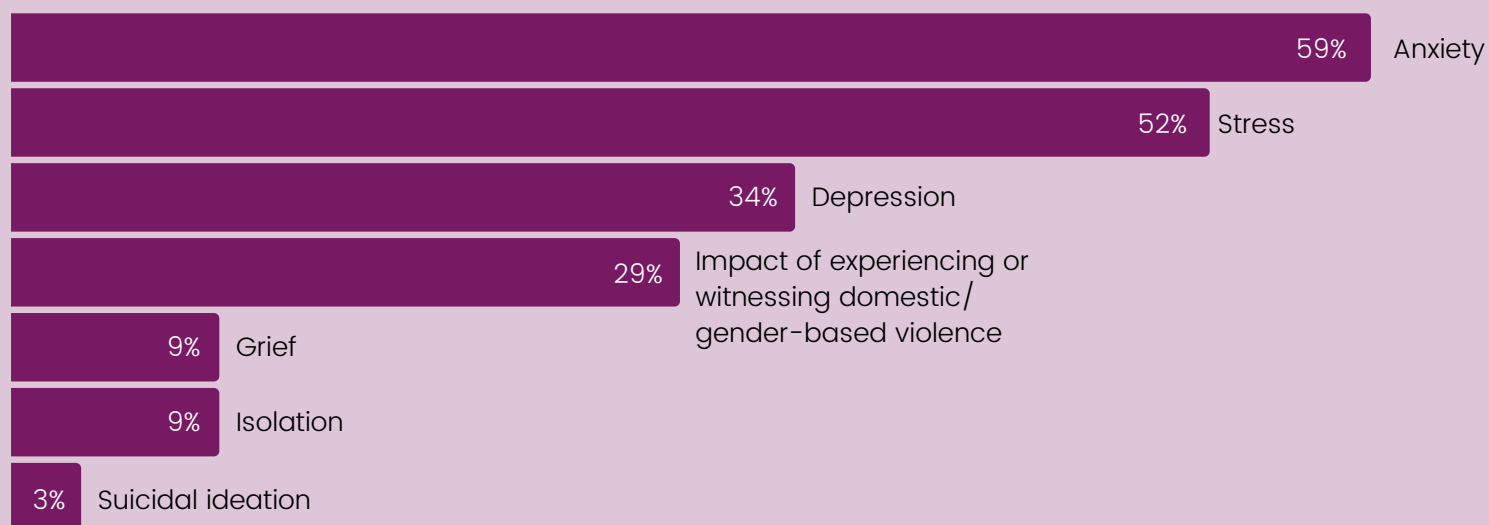
Percentage of incoming AAFSC clients reporting a need for mental health services



# LANDSCAPE OF NEED

The highest-reported need among those receiving services is anxiety and stress. A considerable number of clients are also seeking services due to the ramifications of experiencing or witnessing domestic violence. Our clinicians are uniquely suited to navigate these sensitive topics with cultural responsiveness.

Percentage of AAFSC clients reporting a need for mental health services upon intake



# MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT SNAPSHOT

**184**

adults and youth received  
mental health counseling  
services

**2,803**

mental health counseling  
sessions offered

**5,737**

community members  
educated about mental  
health resources through the  
Reclaiming Our Health  
initiative

**15**

mental health counseling  
sessions attended on  
average per client

**600%**

increase in mental health  
counseling program  
utilization since the start of  
COVID-19



# PROGRAM EVALUATION

As a learning organization, AAFSC prioritizes our system for monitoring success and impact, and adapts our evaluations such that they reflect the nature of our programming and are in-step with industry-standard practices. We collect both quantitative and qualitative data related to our Mental Health initiatives and assist with project monitoring and evaluation. AAFSC administers a program intake survey to understand participants' circumstances and needs. For clients who receive one-on-one counseling services, clinicians collect ongoing qualitative data in the form of Progress Notes and administer a quantitative evaluation in the form of a pre-post test scale. Our Reclaiming Our Health initiative is evaluated using a knowledge-attitude-behavior survey to assess outcomes, attitudes, and satisfaction.

## World Health Organization - Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5)

AAFSC measures outcomes for our direct mental health counseling services using the World Health Organization - Five Well-Being Index (WHO-5). AAFSC analyzes individual as well as aggregate WHO-5 scores to evaluate program performance to understand trends in client well-being, and to inform strategic decisions. This scale is evidence-based and has been tested for validity and reliability in multicultural environments, including with Middle Eastern and Asian populations. The questionnaire has been translated in over 30 languages, including Arabic.



**WHO-5 scores increased by 41% after receiving services**

Total pre-tests: 133  
Total post-tests: 26  
Jan 20 - May 22





# PROGRAM EVALUATION

## Health Minds Healthy Life Workshop Survey

In our Heathy Minds Healthy Life workshops, a core component of the ROH curriculum, we measure immediate knowledge-attitude-behavior changes resulting from participation, and assess community perceptions and satisfaction. Our survey is administered upon conclusion of the workshop, and is comprised of six responsive and culturally relevant questions that are adaptive to a range of mental health literacy levels. Our ROH cohort tracks results in real time to inform continuous quality improvement. We also recognize that these workshops provide a first step for many in their mental health journey and function in coordination with our suite of project activities to achieve destigmatization and long-term attitude and behavior change.

### Assessing Outcomes



### Assessing Awareness



# WHAT'S NEXT?

While we are proud of our accomplishments through this initiative, AAFSC recognizes that the need for accessible, culturally and linguistically competent mental health services is urgent and unprecedented. Many organizations refer clients to AAFSC, as our agency is one of the only providers offering free mental health counseling in languages like Bangla, Arabic, Urdu, and Dari. As a result, our Mental Health Counseling Program often has an extensive waitlist -- currently exceeding 100. AAFSC works diligently to address this need through program expansion, community outreach, and by pursuing structural changes that expand the city-wide availability of linguistically and culturally competent clinicians, equipped to support AMENAMSA immigrant and refugee communities.

Amid the landscape of heightening discrimination, hate crimes, and isolation, immigrant communities are seeking out trusted and community-based resources now more than ever. AAFSC is committed to enhancing access to critical support and changing the narrative around mental health in underserved and underrepresented communities.



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To support the immigrant and refugee families that AAFSC serves, please donate today at [aafscny.org/donate](https://aafscny.org/donate)

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## NYC Family Justice Center, Staten Island

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AAFSC's Research Institute is a hub for research & evaluation that measures community needs and analyzes the impact of culturally and linguistically-responsive programs and initiatives. For more reports and insights, visit our Impact page at [aafscny.org/our-impact](https://aafscny.org/our-impact).

