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TORTURE SURVIVOR CENTER COMMENDS PROGRESS TOWARD STATEWIDE REFUGEE MENTAL HEALTH SCREENING

St. Paul, MN – The Center for Victims of Torture™ (CVT) today praised the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) for a recent report that makes significant progress toward a formal, statewide refugee mental health screening process.

The report identified five questions to be asked during the initial health screening exam given to all newly arrived refugees. MDH will pilot the questions with select clinics in Minnesota before implementing the mental health screening statewide.

“Refugees who suffered torture and violent conflict can have debilitating symptoms, including terrifying nightmares, crippling anxiety, and depression,” said Greg Vinson, PhD, Senior Researcher and Evaluation Manager. “This is heartbreaking, since we have effective treatments for these issues. Implementing a mental health screening will help Minnesota to identify refugees most in need and refer them to appropriate services so they can recover and resettle successfully.”

Most states do not screen refugees, even though refugee trauma survivors are at increased risk of developing posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and major depression, according to a national survey conducted by University of Minnesota researchers in collaboration with CVT and the State Refugee Health Coordinator.

MDH identified five questions that, according to Vinson, can be used cross culturally with different refugee populations. The questions will not be used to diagnose mental illness but will help identify refugees with a high level of emotional distress or having difficulty engaging in daily life. With early detection, they will be referred for a more in-depth assessment and treatment.

“We were pleased to be part of the working group assembled by the department’s Refugee Health Program and the thoughtful, evidence-based approach the state took to refugee mental health screening,” Vinson said. “The questions selected are culturally appropriate, but also sensitive to the time constraints faced by health care providers implementing the screening.”

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The Minnesota Department of Health issued its final report, *Mental Health Screening Recommendations for Newly Arrived Refugees in Minnesota*, on April 15, 2014. Clinicians and researchers from the Center for Victims of Torture along with refugee screening clinicians, policy makers and professionals in international health participated in the working group that advised the state Refugee Health Program.