

Access to Quality Health Care Requires a Systems Approach



Community Leading the Way

The Institute for Social Policy and Understanding (ISPU), a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that provides research and education about American Muslims, conducted a poll that found that **Muslims in the United States were the most likely religious group to face religious discrimination in health care settings.** They wanted firsthand insights into what solutions Muslim community members wanted based on lived experiences.



This study used community-based system dynamics (CBSD) methods, which included **holding a series of workshops with Muslims in southeast Michigan along with interviews with community leaders.** Community-based system dynamics involves facilitated group discussions in a workshop format, conducting a qualitative analysis of diagrams and written content generated from the workshops, and developing a quantitative model of the relationship between factors identified by workshop participants from the community and scientific data and knowledge.



What Did This Research Reveal?

The study participants developed a problem statement, grounded in community experiences: **“Which factors affect access to health care for Muslim communities in southeast Michigan?”**



The study found that Islamophobia, racial discrimination, lack of cultural competence, language and communication barriers, religious accommodation issues, access and affordability gaps (among many other factors) impact Muslim communities in accessing health care.

Why Do These Findings Matter?

ISPU's recommendations, co-created with the community, include designing and implementing prevention strategies tailored to neighborhood demographics, immigration experience, and socioeconomic context; addressing hard-to-reach populations through diplomatic, culturally informed approaches; increasing the number of Muslim Community Health Workers; and holistically addressing social determinants of health.

The findings illustrate that the barriers to accessing health care are systemic and multi-dimensional, so the solutions must also involve stakeholders across sectors.

An interviewee noted that they were, “Impressed with the scope [of the project]— [it was] detailed, [included a] broad range of policy outcomes, rooted in community, built on the experiences of people.”

How the Research is Shaping the Future

The information the community gathered is a starting point for interested and motivated individuals and/or organizations to close the identified gaps and address inequities. **Community participation guided every step of this work. This research provides foundational knowledge for Arab and South Asian Muslims in southeast Michigan communities to successfully and systematically advocate for accessible, equitable, unbiased and quality health care.**





ISPU has had productive conversations with local health system leaders at Henry Ford Health and Henry Ford Health Global. In April 2025, ISPU held an event to present their report findings. Local leaders Dr. Abdul El-Sayed (current candidate U.S. Senate in Michigan), Ali Abazeed (Chief Public Health Officer of Dearborn, MI), and Danish Hasan (Director of the Islamic Center of Detroit's Health Department and Mental Health Clinic) reflected on the findings and underscored their importance moving forward.



Learn More

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