Immigrant Women’s Roundtable Report

A comprehensive look at immigrant women and their families living in Cambridge

Cambridge, Massachusetts
January 2012

Prepared by:
CAMBRIDGE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
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Introduction

This report offers community leaders, city departments, agencies, and others a practical, convenient way of looking at immigrant women and their families living in Cambridge today.

This report is a response to community members who voiced their concern that immigrant women’s influence is typically neglected, especially in quantitative city-wide statistics. The absence of any accurate source of data concerning immigrant women living in Cambridge not only hinders their participation in, and use of, the programs and services that are available to them, but also conceals the gaps in service that still exist.

In late 2008, sixty Cambridge community stakeholders and policy and program leaders attended the Women’s Data Workshop on the Report on the Status of Women and Girls in Cambridge, a comprehensive, first-of-its-kind report on the status of women and girls in the city (www.cambridgewomenscommission.org/download/StatusReport2008.pdf). Written by the Cambridge Women’s Commission, in collaboration with the Institute for Community Health and the Cambridge Public Health Department, the report is an accessible resource that enables policymakers, program developers, and others to see a current picture of women and girls in Cambridge in five key areas: economic issues, older women, women’s health, women’s safety, and young women/girls.

While supporting the significance of this report, participants noted that certain women’s voices were not sufficiently represented in the data. Participants stressed that we needed to lead the charge to increase gender-based data collection for these groups, including Cambridge’s immigrant population. Subsequently, the Immigrant Women’s Roundtable was formed.

Chaired by the Cambridge Women’s Commission, the Immigrant Women’s Roundtable is composed of agencies, program providers and immigrant women. Its mission is to improve the mechanisms to reach and serve marginalized communities in the city and to engage them not only as immigrants, but as women. The report was developed to gather data to better connect with elected officials, city departments and agencies.

The report comprises data from a variety of sources. The main source is the 2010 Immigrant Women’s Roundtable Survey. The survey was written and developed by the Immigrant Women’s Roundtable. Some questions were based on a survey included in the New American Media, Women Immigrants: Stewards of the 21st Century Family report. While printed only in English, the survey was vetted and edited by Community Engagement Team Outreach Workers. The Outreach Workers also helped develop
a comprehensive written introduction for survey participants and a Frequently Asked Questions sheet that accompanied each survey. Surveys were distributed and collected by the Outreach Workers and Immigrant Women Roundtable members. The Immigrant Women’s Roundtable received 196 completed questionnaires.

Other sources of data include the United States Census, the American Community Survey, Cambridge School Department and the Community Learning Center.

Executive Summary

Those in the community with an interest connecting immigrant women and their families in Cambridge with community programs, and looking to find what types of services and programming are working, and what services and programs are missing, are invited to use this report.

Some interesting highlights of the report include:

• Nearly two-thirds of those interviewed had been in the United States for 10 years or less.
• Most women moved here to create a better life for their children.
• 27% of children enrolled in Cambridge schools speak a language other than English at home.
• No woman reported using a family childcare or a preschool center for their children.
• Over 40% of women had at least one year of college or other post high-school education.
• 40% of immigrant women in Cambridge reported having household income of less than $25,000 a year; less than 10% reported having annual household income of more than $50,000.
• Of those women with children, about 7% reported that their children do not receive vaccinations.
• 32% of the sample does not understand their rights as immigrants in Cambridge; 20% have “OK” knowledge of their rights.
• 52% are aware of the existence of laws protecting women.
• More than 20% do not understand spoken English well and are not comfortable asking questions in English. Almost 50% have taken English classes in Cambridge.

Moving forward, our goal is for readers to examine the data as it relates to their own agencies, programming and policies. Each organization and community stakeholder can use the information to inform future decisions and program planning. The Immigrant Women’s Roundtable will be organizing more events and discussions throughout the community to continue the discussions sparked by this data.
I. Demographics

Countries of Origin, Gender, Age

Of the total population of the United States, 12% were born outside of the country.

Of the total Massachusetts population, 14% were born outside of the country.
Of the total Cambridge population (105,061), 26% (27,316) were born outside of the United States. The percentage of foreign born residents of Cambridge is more than twice the national average, and nearly double the immigrant population of Massachusetts.

Of the 26% of Cambridge residents who are foreign-born, 37% were born in Asia, 26% were born in Europe, 22% were born Latin America, 11% were born in Africa, 3% were born in Northern America, and 1% were born in Oceania. A more specific breakdown can be found in the following graph.
## Countries of Origin for Foreign Born Cambridge Residents

### TOTAL: 27,316

**Europe:** 7,106

- Northern Europe: 1,603
  - United Kingdom (inc. Crown Dependencies): 912
    - United Kingdom, excluding England and Scotland: 453
  - England: 360
  - Scotland: 99
- Ireland: 243
- Denmark: 51
- Norway: 111
- Sweden: 205
- Other Northern Europe: 81

- Western Europe: 1,649
  - Austria: 67
  - Belgium: 85
  - France: 581
  - Germany: 634
  - Netherlands: 160
  - Switzerland: 122

- Southern Europe: 1,952
  - Greece: 202
  - Italy: 712
  - Portugal: 746
  - Spain: 284
  - Other Southern Europe: 8

- Eastern Europe: 1,902
  - Albania: 85
  - Belarus: 9
  - Bulgaria: 186
  - Croatia: 46
  - Czechoslovakia (includes Czech Republic and Slovakia): 120
  - Hungary: 17
  - Latvia: 63
  - Lithuania: 24
  - Moldova: 35
  - Poland: 273
  - Romania: 271
  - Russia: 502
  - Ukraine: 119
  - Bosnia and Herzegovina: 25
  - Yugoslavia: 64
  - Serbia: 42
  - Other Eastern Europe: 63

**Africa:** 3,065

- Eastern Africa: 2,082
  - Eritrea: 110
  - Ethiopia: 1,402
  - Kenya: 54
  - Other Eastern Africa: 516
- Middle Africa: 77
  - Cameroon: 17
  - Other Middle Africa: 60

- Africa: 3,065
  - Eastern Africa: 2,082
  - Eritrea: 110
  - Ethiopia: 1,402
  - Kenya: 54
  - Other Eastern Africa: 516

- Southern Africa: 122
  - South Africa: 90
  - Other Southern Africa: 32

- Western Africa: 340
  - Cape Verde: 66
  - Ghana: 170
  - Liberia: 7
  - Nigeria: 68
  - Other Western Africa: 29
  - Africa, n.e.c.: 58

**Asia:** 9,964

- Eastern Asia: 5,466
  - China: 3,536
    - China, excluding Hong Kong and Taiwan: 2,606
    - Hong Kong: 355
    - Taiwan: 575
  - Japan: 754
  - Korea: 1,176
- South Central Asia: 2,585
- Afghanistan: 10
### Countries of origin for Foreign Born Cambridge Residents

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<td>Sri Lanka</td>
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<td>Australia and New Zealand Subregion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Americas</td>
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<td>Latin America:</td>
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<td>Cuba</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Dominican Republic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Haiti</td>
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<td>Jamaica</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trinidad and Tobago</td>
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<td>West Indies</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other Caribbean</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Central America:</td>
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<td>Mexico</td>
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<td>Costa Rica</td>
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<td>El Salvador</td>
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<td>Guatemala</td>
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<td>Honduras</td>
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<td>Panama</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other Central America</td>
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<td>South America:</td>
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<td>Argentina</td>
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<td>Venezuela</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Other South America</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Northern America:</td>
<td>894</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other Northern America</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey
The US Census data captures all immigrants living in Cambridge, including those here temporarily for study and research. Undergraduate and graduate students, along with their families, are an important subset of Cambridge’s foreign-born population. At Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge’s two largest universities, 2010 numbers indicated that 6,900 foreign born women and men were studying at one of these two universities: 855 from China, 771 from Canada, 586 from Korea, 502 from India, 196 Singapore, and 190 from Taiwan. These students are largely graduate students. Breakdown by gender was not available.

For the purpose of the June 2010 Immigrant Women’s Roundtable Report, these individuals were not included in the survey outreach efforts because their need for services are different than those who settle here permanently.

(Source: MIT Institutional Research, Office of the Provost; Harvard International Office)
Country of Origin:
2010 Immigrant Women's Roundtable Survey

Close to 40% of 196 participants from the 2010 Immigrant Women’s Roundtable Survey are from Bangladesh and 30% are from Haiti. The remaining 30% are from 16 additional countries. Since the survey was conducted in partnership with the Cambridge Learning Center, with the help of CET Outreach Workers, certain populations were more readily accessible and were therefore represented in higher numbers than the general Cambridge immigrant population.
Just over 50% of Cambridge residents identify as female, and 49.7% identify as male.

In the total foreign-born population of Cambridge, 48% (13,166) identify as female, and 52% identify as male.
Of the women who took the survey, 1% were 19 or under, 20% were in their 20's, 34% in their 30's, 20% in their 40's, 9% in their 50's, and 6% in their 60's.

Ninety-two percent of foreign-born females in Cambridge are over 18 years old.
II. Immigration Trends

Year Entered the United States: Cambridge Immigrants

Of the total number of foreign-born persons living in Cambridge, 15% immigrated to this country before 1980, 16% immigrated between 1980 and 1989, 24% immigrated between 1990 and 1999, and 45% immigrated after 2000. This number includes students who are in Cambridge temporarily.

Overall, 34% of respondents have been in the United States 10 years or more. Over 52% of Haitian women responded that they had been in the United States for more than 10 years while only 27% of Ethiopian women and 17% of Bengali women had been here 10 years or more.
Eighty-eight percent of the sample has lived in Cambridge for more than a year. Nearly 43% have lived in Cambridge for more than 5 years. In addition, families from Bangladesh are the most recent immigrants to Cambridge. More than 10% of Bengali respondents have been here less than a year.

Just under 40% of the women moved to Cambridge to create a better life for their children. Respondents were able to choose multiple reasons.
III. Family Life and Children

Relationship Status:
2010 Immigrant Women's Roundtable Survey

- 72% Married/Long-term relationship
- 17% Single/Never married
- 5% Divorced
- 4% Widowed
- 2% No reply

72% of the sample are married or in long-term relationships. Less than 5% are divorced.

Number of People Per Household:
2010 Immigrant Women’s Roundtable Survey

- 64% 1
- 21% 2 to 5
- 11% 6 to 10
- 3% More than 10
- 1% No reply

Twelve percent of the women are living in a household with 6 or more people.
Eighty-eight percent of the women report having at least one child. Twenty-one percent have 4 or more children.

In the 2010–2011 school year, 6,060 children enrolled in Cambridge public schools. Just over 4% of these children were not born in the United States. This number does not reflect American-born children of immigrant parents.
Of the 4% of children enrolled in the Cambridge School system who are foreign born, 21% are from Haiti.

While only 4% of Cambridge school children are foreign born, 27% (1,644) of children enrolled in Cambridge schools speak a language other than English at home, illustrating the larger numbers of first and second generation families.
Twenty-seven percent of children (1,644) surveyed speak a language other than English at home. While Spanish, Creole, Amharic, Portuguese, Bengali, Arabic, and Chinese make up nearly 20% of languages spoken at home, the remaining 7% include forty-nine other languages.

Women responded that they were involved in the decision to have children 66% of the time.
Thirty-eight percent of the women provide care for their children themselves. None reported using a family childcare or a preschool center.

IV. Language Skills

Languages Spoken at Home:
Cambridge, MA

Among people at least five years old living in Cambridge, 31% spoke a language other than English at home. This is slightly higher than the 27% of Cambridge public school students who speak a language other than English at home.
Out of the 31% of Cambridge residents that do not speak English at home, 40% speak other Indo-European Languages (non-Spanish), 25% speak Asian or Pacific Islander Languages, 20% speak Spanish, and 15% speak other languages. A further breakdown of languages can be found in the following table.

### Language Spoken at Home, Cambridge Residents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>number of people who speak the language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Only) English</td>
<td>70,213</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spanish or Spanish Creole</td>
<td>6,104</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>4,512</td>
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<tr>
<td>French (incl. Patois, Cajun)</td>
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<tr>
<td>French Creole</td>
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<tr>
<td>African languages</td>
<td>2,316</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portuguese or Portuguese Creole</td>
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<td>Korean</td>
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<td>Other Indic languages</td>
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<td>Italian</td>
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<td>Other Asian languages</td>
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<td>Japanese</td>
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<td>German</td>
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<td>Other and unspecified languages</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: The 2005–2009 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate
When asked, “How well do you understand English when someone is speaking to you?”, nearly 60% of women responded that they could understand English “very well” or “well.” Twenty-two percent of the women responded they could understand English “not well” or “not at all.” While only 15% of Haitian women said that they could not understand English well, and all Ethiopian women spoke English “OK” or better, over a third of Bengali women, 36%, said their comprehension of English was poor. In addition, older women were much less likely to feel comfortable understanding English than younger women.
When asked “How comfortable are you asking general questions in English?”, almost half of women answered “very comfortable” or “comfortable”, while 20% of the women answered “uncomfortable” or “very uncomfortable.” While the vast majority of Ethiopian and Haitian women are comfortable asking basic questions in English, 37% of Bengali women do not feel comfortable asking basic questions in English. In addition, older women were much less likely to feel comfortable asking questions in English than younger women.

Almost half of the women have taken an English class in Cambridge.
V. Education

Seventy-two percent of the women had 9 or more years of schooling in their countries of origin. Forty percent had at least one year of college or other post high-school education.

Forty-eight percent of the women have taken an English class in the United States.
Thirty-one percent of the women have taken a computer class in the United States.

For those women who had a higher education degree, just over two-thirds of them were not using their degrees in the United States.
The most common occupation for women in their countries of origin was a housewife. Other fields or occupations included banking, business, medical (doctor, nurse, etc.), teacher/school, accountant, service, NGO, cashier, social worker/psychologist, officer, farmer, engineer, childcare, dancer, secretary, seamstress, electrician, and hairstylist.

When the women first arrived in the United States, 38% were able to find work within the first year.
The women reported that within the first year after arriving in the United States, 54% of their husbands were able to find work.

When asked “Who makes the financial decisions in your family?”, 19% of the women say that the men make the financial decisions in the household. Thirty-eight percent of Bengali women said this was the case.
The majority of immigrant women in Cambridge have a household income of less than $25,000 a year (40%); less than 10% have an annual household income of more than $50,000; and almost 33% chose not to disclose this information.

Twenty-three percent of foreign-born residents in Cambridge are living below 100% of the poverty line. The overall poverty rate in Massachusetts is 10%, and in Cambridge it’s 15%.

For 2011, the federal poverty threshold for two adults and two children is $22,356. For a family of one adult and two children, the threshold is $18,540.
While 90% of foreign-born women in Cambridge have health insurance, the overall rate of coverage in Cambridge is much higher, at around 98-99%. Haitian women were least likely to have health insurance—only 84% reported having insurance. Only 45% of women who have been in the US for less than a year had health insurance. For those who been here longer, much higher rates of insurance were reported.

Forty percent of the women rely on MassHealth Insurance.
Sixty-nine percent of the women have their children vaccinated. Women who are in the US longer are more likely to get their children vaccinated.

When asked, “How well do you understand your rights as an immigrant woman?” 44% of the sample understood their rights as immigrant women “well” or better, while a third (32%) of women responded they did not know their rights well or “not at all.” However, 59% of women from Bangladesh indicated that their understanding of immigrant rights was not strong (“not well” or “not at all.”)
When asked, "Do you know there are laws here that protect women and children?", a little over half of the women knew there were laws in the United States to protect women and children.

Eighty-six percent of the women felt “safe” or “very safe” in their homes.
Sixty percent of the women felt “comfortable” or “very comfortable” when leaving the home.

VIII. Cambridge Resources

Class/Program Participation:
2010 Immigrant Women’s Roundtable Survey

Women responded they would be most likely to attend free classes in Cambridge if the programs also offered free childcare.
Of the programs and services offered in Cambridge, the most popular ones among our sample are the libraries (50% of the sample have utilized the libraries); Cambridge Health Alliance (49% of the sample have utilized CHA); Community Learning Center (43% of the sample have utilized the Center); Center for Families (32%); and Agenda for Children (31%). While the large majority of the respondents have children, women who do not have children were more likely to utilize the libraries (73%) than those women with children (49%). Conversely, 51% of women with children have used programs at the Cambridge Health Alliance, compared with 18% of women with no children.

Other programs mentioned include a Church or Mosque or Synagogue (26%), the Family Resource Center (25%), the Childcare Resource Center (22%), After School Programs (21%), the Guidance Center (15%), CEOC (14%), the YWCA (13%), the Multi Service Center (10%), Child Care Programs (13%), the Neighborhood Youth Centers (7%), Fuel Assistance (5%), Families First (4%), and the Women’s Center (0%).
The women found out about programs in Cambridge most often through outreach workers (25%) and flyers (19%). Older foreign-born women (over 60) are more likely to find about community programs from other family members than younger foreign-born women. Younger women (under 40) rely more on flyers posted on community bulletin boards. Women over 50 report looking at newspapers and the internet equally to find out about programs, while younger women (under 40) are twice as likely to use the internet as to read newspapers. Haitian women are the group most likely to hear about programming from their religious community (26%).
Resources for Women in Cambridge

Though not an exhaustive list, the following are some resources that Cambridge women may find helpful:

**General**

Cambridge Women's Commission  617.349.4697  
51 Inman Street, Cambridge

The Women's Center  617.354.8897  
46 Pleasant Street in Cambridge near Central Square  
   Has lists of resources and provides peer-led support groups for women on many issues.

**Childcare Resources**

The Child Care Resource Center  617.547.9861  
   Maintains a list of area centers and provides information about available slots and income eligibility.

City of Cambridge Department of Human Service Programs  617.349.6200  
   Provides a number of child care and out-of-school time programs.

**Domestic Violence**

Emergency  911

Cambridge Police DV Unit  617.349.3371  
DV Liaison (weekdays)

Transition House Hotline  617.661.7203  
   Transition House was New England's first battered women’s shelter and currently offers an emergency shelter and transitional housing for victims of domestic violence, as well as education and prevention programs (24 hours).

SafeLink  877.785.2020  
(24 hours, English/Spanish)

Cambridge Public Health Department  617.665.3816  
Violence Prevention Coordinator

Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence  
Helpline  617.338.2355  
Office Telephone  617.338.2350  
   Primarily serves immigrants and refugees from East, South, and Southeast Asia currently living in Massachusetts and New England suffering from, or at risk of suffering from, domestic violence.
Education/Training

Community Learning Center   617.349.6363
Provides free services to Cambridge residents. They serve adults who need basic education, English for speakers of other languages, GED, college transition, and employment skills. CLC staff also create curriculum and work with adult education teachers from other agencies and with other community groups. Classes are run year-round, morning, afternoon, and evening.

Bunker Hill Community College: Cambridge Satellite   617.228.2420
Offers evening classes during the fall and spring semesters at the Cambridge Rindge and Latin High School, 459 Broadway, Cambridge. The college offers a variety of courses in the computer, accounting, and early childhood development areas, as well as mathematics, English, and writing. The satellite campus offers a range of student services, including academic advising/counseling, enrollment information and information on federal financial aid and other tuition assistance programs.

Lesley University, Center for the Adult Learner   617.868.9600
This Center was created to support adults, many of whom are juggling work and family responsibilities, to achieve their personal and professional goals.

Cambridge College   617.349.3480
Offers a unique environment where working adults can build their education on a lifetime of learning. Cambridge College recognizes diversity as an asset to the classroom, the community, and to society. Their innovative teaching and learning model helps adult students meet the challenges of higher education.

Housing Issues

Cambridge Housing Authority   www.cambridge-housing.org
Develops, manages, and administers subsidized affordable housing for low-income elderly, family and disabled households. They develop and manage safe, good quality, affordable housing for low-income individuals and families in a manner that promotes citizenship, community and self-reliance.

Cambridge Human Rights Commission   617.349.4396
A city law enforcement agency that investigates complaints of discrimination that occur in Cambridge-in housing, employment, education and public accommodations.

Immigrant Women Resources

Massachusetts Alliance of Portuguese Speakers (MAPS), Cambridge Office   617.864.7600
Works with and for the Brazilian, Cape Verdean, Portuguese and other Portuguese-speaking communities to increase access and remove barriers to health, education and social services through direct services, advocacy, leadership and community development.

Ethiopian Community Mutual Assistance Association  617.492.4232
Provides information and referral services to low-income Ethiopian refugees and immigrants who are residents of Cambridge.

Haitian Coalition  617.625.6400
Helps Haitians organize to improve the economic, political, physical, and social environments in Somerville and Cambridge and provides services to Haitians living in surrounding communities.

Legal Assistance

Community Legal Services and Counseling Center  617.661.1010
The only volunteer-based agency of its kind in the area, combining legal assistance and mental health counseling.

Mental Health

Cambridge Health Alliance Psychiatric Emergency Services  617.665.1560
The Cambridge Hospital campus has a separate Psychiatric ER, which helps people in severe emotional distress.

Reaching Out About Depression (ROAD)  www.reachingoutaboutdepression.org
A community-based program created by and for women in low-income neighborhoods who are suffering with depression and its related issues. All services are offered free-of-charge.

About the Cambridge Women’s Commission

Established in 1977 as a City department, the Cambridge Commission on the Status of Women (CCSW) works in an inclusive manner to promote equality and justice for all women and girls. The CCSW works with other City departments and officials, local organizations, and state government to increase opportunities through program development, policy recommendations, and public education in key areas significantly affecting women and girls. The scope of programming is inclusive: offering outreach and education on issues concerning young women and girls; providing information on health and violence prevention; preserving Cambridge women’s history; supporting new artistic mediums; and exploring better ways of connecting with more marginalized groups in the community, such as immigrant women and women who are homeless.