

Many individuals from countries affected by war, violence, and persecution seek asylum in the United States. Asylum seekers make the difficult decision to leave their homes in search of a better life, and face great difficulties and danger during travels to the US. Once at the US border, these individuals are placed in detention centers with incarceration-like conditions, and some wait up to years for an immigration hearing.

Inadequate medical care is a well-known phenomenon within private, for-profit detention centers. Detainees with underlying illnesses do not receive adequate medical care or proper medications, including insulin for diabetes or antiretroviral drugs for HIV. Isolation and confinement practices also exacerbate mental illness. The private, for-profit nature of some detention centers prevent local public health authorities from ensuring the appropriate medical care of detainees.

The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 made crowded conditions of these detention centers even more dangerous. The number of immigrants and asylum seekers in detention centers has decreased nationally since the beginning of the pandemic; however, language barriers, low implementation of Covid-19 testing, and continued difficulty implementing social distancing continues to put detainees at risk for infection and illness.

Measures can be taken to alleviate suffering related to medical neglect that occurs in detention centers. We recommend ending of private corporations running detention centers and decreasing the population within these facilities. Additionally, we recommend increasing public health agency oversight, medical staff, and Covid-19 testing resources within these facilities.