

HEALTH4ALL: FULL-SCOPE MEDI-CAL FOR UNDOCUMENTED SENIORS

SB 56 (DURAZO)

Everyone Covered – No One Left Out: Addressing California's Health Care Crisis

Undocumented Californians are facing a health crisis. The Trump administration has separated families, increased deportations, and undermined immigrant communities' access to health care and the safety net. On top of this trauma, COVID-19 has hit undocumented immigrants especially hard, including millions of frontline and essential workers taking on disproportionate risk of exposure. The pandemic has further exacerbated racial and ethnic health disparities and has made it clear that access to comprehensive health care is necessary for every resident of our state, regardless of where they were born. It is especially critical that our state act now to protect the health of seniors, who are the most vulnerable at this time. **SB 56 would provide full-scope Medi-Cal to all income-eligible seniors (ages 65+) by removing immigration status as an eligibility exclusion.**

Californians Barred from Health Care: Undocumented & Uninsured

California is home to the largest number of immigrants in the United States, including roughly 2.3 million undocumented immigrants who make up about 6% of the state population.¹ In 2018, undocumented Californians contributed \$3.7 billion in state taxes and local taxes, \$7 billion in federal taxes, and over \$40 billion in spending power to our economy.² They are overrepresented in jobs deemed “essential” during the pandemic,³ yet they are excluded from federal stimulus payments, unemployment insurance, and safety net programs for health care and food assistance.

While the state has set up temporary programs for the uninsured to access COVID-related care, these barely scratch the surface of the health crises that plague our immigrant communities—especially elderly individuals whom the virus has preyed upon. Undocumented seniors who have gone years without so much as a check-up may have unknown chronic conditions and need preventive care and treatment for all of their health concerns, not just COVID.

Lack of access to health coverage harms immigrant communities and our entire health care system. Health insurance protects individuals from financial distress and excessive out-of-pocket spending, encourages earlier diagnosis of chronic conditions, improves use of preventive services, and reduces preventable mortality.⁴ No one in our state should have to wait until an emergency to be able to access health care.

Towards Universal Health Care Coverage

The expansion of Medi-Cal, regardless of immigration status, to all income-eligible children in 2016 and young adults in 2020 ensured comprehensive care for hundreds of thousands of young people and a healthier California overall. Covering seniors by passing SB 56 is the next logical step to close a significant gap that remains in our health care system.

By removing immigration status as an eligibility barrier to Medi-Cal, California can build a more universal, equitable health care system for all who call California home. Health care is a human right, and our health system is stronger when everyone is included.

For more information, please contact Orville Thomas (othomas@caimmigrant.org) with the California Immigrant Policy Center and Jose Torres-Casillas (jtorres@health-access.org) with Health Access California.

¹ <https://immigrantdataca.org/indicators/immigration-status/>

² <https://immigrantdataca.org/indicators/economic-contributions#/?immig=3>

³ <https://immigrantdataca.org/indicators/industries-and-occupations#/>

⁴ Dietz, Miranda and Laurel Lucia, et al. November 2018. “California's Health Coverage Gains to Erode Without Further State Action.” UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and UC Berkeley Labor Center.