

State Advocacy Template for Reaching Immigrant Populations with Community Health Workers: Illinois

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Undocumented immigrants will be largely excluded from the opportunities provided by the Affordable Care Act. Why should states be concerned about the unmet healthcare needs of these immigrant populations? This advocacy resource looks at Illinois as an example.

The National Peer Support Collaborative Learning Network is a joint initiative by Peers for Progress and the National Council of La Raza (NCLR). The Network focuses on developing and sharing evidence of benefits of peer support programs, best practices, effective evaluation methods, models of organizing peer support within health systems as well as effective models of advocacy. The Network is supported through the Together on Diabetes Initiative of the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation.

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Access to Care Crisis for Immigrant Populations

- With the advent of the Affordable Care Act (ACA), up to **700,000** uninsured Illinois citizens will gain access to health insurance through Medicaid.¹
- Up to **300,000** other Illinoisans are expected to enroll in private insurance plans—many with the help of federal subsidies—under the Illinois Health Insurance Marketplace (“the Marketplace”).²

There is one major group who is excluded from both the Medicaid expansion and opportunities to purchase private plans in the Marketplace: the approximately **525,000 undocumented immigrants** living in Illinois, or four percent of the state’s total population.³

- Illinois has **the fifth highest population** of undocumented immigrants in the United States, and the exclusion of this population from healthcare reform will have significant implications for the state, both financially and from a public health perspective.
- Further, even documented immigrants within the state are excluded from Medicaid for their first five years of legal status and may be unaware of their healthcare options under the Marketplaces and other programs.

It is essential that this group be informed of their eligibility under different health care programs and linked to needed care!!!!

How Community Health Workers Can Help Improve Access to Care for Immigrant Populations

1. CHW's can play a key role in reducing emergency room visits and promoting utilization of cost-effective clinical care among immigrant populations.

- A survey has shown that 34% of immigrants use the emergency room as their primary mode of health care.⁴

2. CHW's are necessary to help immigrants navigate the application process and eligibility rules of healthcare programs, under the ACA and other state and federal health programs.

- Documented immigrants residing in the U.S. and their children are eligible for health care services and government programs, yet many do not apply as a result of cultural or language barriers.
- Many immigrants do not know that they are eligible or lack the English language proficiency to participate fully in the enrollment process without assistance, or may lack computers or other tools which can aid in applying for health insurance.⁵
- CHWs are critical sources for providing important information about eligibility and helping individuals to access information and programs to which they otherwise may otherwise remain unaware.

3. CHWs can help mitigate the climate of fear and mistrust of the American healthcare system as a result of the upsurge of anti-immigration laws in the past few years.

- Many immigrants are hesitant to seek out assistance or apply for public services for fear of mistreatment and deportation.⁶
- Even undocumented parents with U.S. citizen children may be wary of contacting a governmental agency to apply for benefits for their children, out of a concern that their information could be given to Immigration and Customs Enforcement.⁷

- CHWs can help mitigate these fears by providing individuals by correcting misinformation and providing immigrants with necessary information about how to navigate the healthcare system given their particular immigrant statuses.

How Illinois can benefit from improving access to care for immigrant populations

1. State expansion of healthcare for immigrants is good for Illinois hospitals and providers.

- Under the Affordable Care Act, safety-net hospitals will see declines in Medicaid payments for uncompensated care, known as "Medicaid disproportionate share hospital (DSH) payments" of up to \$14.1 billion from fiscal 2014 to 2019.⁸
- In states such as Illinois, with high populations of undocumented immigrants who lack access to any insurance options under the ACA, this steep drop in funding places safety-net hospitals in the state at great risk of severe financial strain as they continue to care for large numbers of uninsured without being adequately compensated.

2. State expansion of healthcare for immigrants is cost effective for Illinois

- In 2011, Illinois spent \$25 million to provide emergency care to just 2,000 people.⁹
- Implementation of the ACA may in fact lead to increases in spending in Emergency Medicaid costs because community health clinics ("CHC"), which have suffered recent funding cuts, may be overwhelmed by an influx of newly insured patients, forcing many illegal immigrants back to the ER as their primary source of healthcare.¹⁰

State funding to provide preventive care for undocumented immigrants is therefore critical to preventing the state from having to bear the cost of expensive emergency care services!!!

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