

Immigrant Access to Healthcare

The Texas Catholic Conference *opposes attempts to reduce access to healthcare for immigrants.*

[We] see an immigration system which is morally unacceptable because it accepts the labor and taxes of millions of workers without offering them the protection of the law. At the same time, we scapegoat these newcomers for our social ills and use them as rhetorical targets for political purposes. It is therefore incumbent upon our elected officials, including Catholics, to carefully scrutinize these laws so as to serve basic human dignity and protect human life. Laws and policies which infringe upon dignity and harm human life are wrong and, as a moral matter, should be rebuffed or repealed. *(Cardinal Mahony, Bishops Call For Comprehensive Immigration Reform)*

A Texas Bishop Speaks:

"We urge communities to offer migrant families hospitality, not hostility, along their journey. We commend church communities that have established migrant shelters that provide appropriate pastoral and social services to migrants. We encourage Catholics and all people of good will to work with the community to address the causes of undocumented migration and to protect the human rights of all immigrants."



-Bishop Plácido Rodríguez, Diocese of Lubbock

Church Teaching

- ★ We are hopeful that, as our public officials debate this issue, that immigrants, regardless of their legal status, are not made scapegoats for the challenges we face as a nation. Rhetoric which attacks the human rights and dignity of the migrant are not becoming of a nation of immigrants. Neither are xenophobic and anti-immigrant attitudes, which only serve to lessen us as a nation. *(Bishop Gerald Kicanas, The Ethical Imperative for Reform of Our Immigration System)*
- ★ Regulating immigration according to criteria of equity and balance is one of the indispensable conditions for ensuring that immigrants are integrated into society with the guarantees required by recognition of their human dignity. Immigrants are to be received as persons and helped, together with their families, to become a part of societal life. *(Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Catholic Church, 298)*
- ★ Affordable and accessible health care is an essential safeguard of human life and a fundamental human right. With an estimated 47 million Americans lacking health care coverage, it is also an urgent national priority. Reform of the nation's health care system needs to be rooted in values that respect human dignity, protect human life, and meet the needs of the poor and uninsured, especially born and unborn children, pregnant women, immigrants, and other vulnerable populations. *(Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States)*

Resources

- ★ **Justice for Immigrants** (USCCB) (www.JusticeForImmigrants.org)
- ★ **Catholic Health Association of Texas** (www.CHATexas.org)
- ★ **Texas Department of State Health Services** (www.dshs.state.tx.us)
- ★ **Texas Health and Human Services Commission** (www.hhsc.state.tx.us)
- ★ **Catholic Charities USA** (www.CatholicCharitiesUSA.org)
- ★ **Catholic Health Association** (www.CHAusa.org)
- ★ **Strangers No Longer: Together on the Journey of Hope** (USCCB) (www.usccb.org/mrs/stranger.shtml)

The Texas Catholic Conference (TCC) is the association of the 15 Roman Catholic dioceses of the State of Texas, and is the Official Public Policy Voice of the Catholic Bishops of Texas.

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Immigrant Access to Health Care

The Texas Catholic Conference opposes attempts to reduce immigrant access to health care, a basic human right. Health care reform is a vital concern to us in Texas, as our state has one of the highest numbers of uninsured persons in the nation. Legal immigrants and their families must be allowed timely access to comprehensive and affordable health care coverage and an adequate safety net must be maintained for those who remain uncovered.

Legal Immigrants and Health Careⁱ

- Legal immigrants work and pay taxes into the system just as U.S. citizens do, and thus should be able to access federal benefits that are a basic human right. In addition, the more persons who pay into the health care system, the more the risk—and the costs—are spread out across the population. Allowing legal immigrants to purchase affordable health care will result in billions of dollars in insurance premiums, helping to pay the cost of health reform in America.
- Legal immigrants are not a burden to the health-care system. According to the non-partisan Kaiser Foundation, non-citizens have less access to health-care and receive less primary health care than U.S. citizens, but they are less likely to use the emergency room. In 2006, 20% of U.S. citizen adults and 22% of U.S. citizen children had visited the emergency room within the past year. In contrast, 13% of non-citizen adults and 12% of non-citizen children had used emergency room care. According to a July 2009 article in the American Journal of Public Health, immigrants are much less likely than U.S. born adults to report being in fair or poor health.
- The average cost of covering legal immigrants is less than that of U.S. citizens. In fact, according to the Immigration Policy Center, the average immigrant uses less than half the dollar amount of health care services than the average native-born U.S. citizen. This is because immigrants are generally younger, and that U.S. citizens make up 78% of the non-elderly uninsured.
- Undocumented pregnant women and children should receive coverage to ensure that newborns are born healthy and children receive regular checkups and vaccinations. Undocumented immigrants have low medical expenses compared to citizens. Only 1.3% of all public medical expenditures in the year 2000 went toward care for undocumented immigrants. Undocumented immigrants also pay federal, state, and local taxes.
- When health care costs are distributed across a broader pool of people, the overall costs for everyone goes down. Inclusion of legal immigrants, who are generally younger and healthier than U.S. citizens, can have an overall positive effect on costs because it will encourage more preventive care and add additional payments to the system. Including legal immigrants in the health care system not only strengthens the system by adding their payments, but is a critical part of their integration into the U.S.

Common Mythsⁱⁱ

Immigrants Don't Pay Taxes — FALSE

Undocumented immigrants pay taxes. Between one half and three quarters of undocumented immigrants pay state and federal taxes. They also contribute to Medicare and provide as much as \$7 billion a year to the Social Security Fund. Further still, undocumented workers pay sales taxes where applicable and property taxes—directly if they own and indirectly if they rent.

Undocumented immigrants are a Burden on the Healthcare System — FALSE

Federal, state and local governments spend approximately \$1.1 billion annually on healthcare costs for undocumented immigrants, aged 18-64, or approximately \$11 in taxes for each U.S. household. This compares to \$88 billion spent on all health care for non-elderly adults in the U.S. in 2000. Foreign born individuals tend to use fewer health care services because they are relatively healthier than their native born counterparts. For example, in Los Angeles County, “total medical spending on undocumented immigrants was \$887 million in 2000 – 6 percent of total costs, although undocumented immigrants comprise 12 percent of the region's residents.”

(Last updated August 5, 2010, 82nd Legislative Session)

ⁱ *The Inclusion of Legal Immigrants in Health Care Reform*. Migration and Refugee Services, USCCB. Web. 5 Aug. 2010. <www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/2009-08-info-legal-immigrants-healthcare-reform.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ Generation, The Third. *Countering the Myths*. Justice for Immigrants. Web. 05 Aug. 2010. <www.justiceforimmigrants.org/myths.html>.