

IMMIGRANT HEALTH

FACT SHEET | *Implications for HIV care in California*

Access to health care is a growing concern for immigrants living in the United States.^{i-iv}

California context

An estimated more than two million undocumented immigrants live in the state of California, comprising approximately one-quarter of undocumented individuals in the US.^v The state is also home to the country's largest population of migrant workers and documented immigrants.^{vi}

Impact on HIV care

Living with HIV requires consistent engagement with the health care system to achieve viral suppression and reduce the risk of onward transmission.^{vii} The barriers that immigrants face when accessing health care and supportive services pose challenges for managing HIV disease.



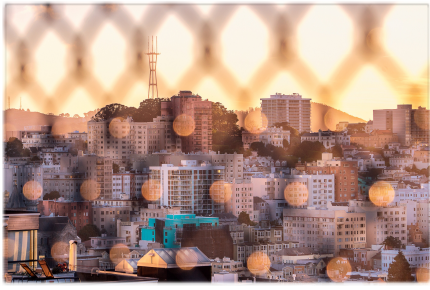
Anti-immigrant policy and rhetoric as barriers to care

The US has experienced a surge of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies since January 2017, especially at the federal level.¹⁻³ Many of these policies increase federal immigration enforcement and limit the entrance of individuals from specific countries to the US.

According to a 2015 study, two of most commonly cited barriers to health care among immigrants were stigma and fear of deportation.⁴

Evidence suggests that immigration-related fears have intensified in the US during the past year.^{1,2,5}

In October 2017, a commentary published in the *Journal of American Medicine* noted an association between increased fears of deportation and a rise in clinic appointment no-show rates, even in sanctuary cities like San Francisco.²



Barriers to care among immigrants

Some of these barriers to health care may include:

- Financial limitations ^{viii}
- Employment conditions or work hours that conflict with clinic appointments ^{viii}
- Lack of cultural sensitivity and inclusion (e.g., translation services) ^{viii}
- Shame and stigma ^{viii}

A 2017 study by the Kaiser Family Foundation explored the daily life and health of immigrant families in the current political climate.^{iv} Researchers found widespread fear, particularly among families with mixed immigration status. Some families limited the amount of time spent outside the home. In some cases, there was decreased enrollment in public programs such as Medicaid, due to concerns that participation could bring family members under scrutiny.^{iv}

Additionally, a clinic that serves immigrant communities in Austin, Texas found that *appointment cancellation rates rose by 50%* following a number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids in February 2017.⁵

What is the effect on human health?

Studies show:

- Anti-immigrant rhetoric has a negative impact on the mental health and self-reported general health of all Latino Americans, regardless of immigration status.^{1, 6-8}
- State-level policies, such as Arizona's SB1070 law enacted in 2010, which required state law enforcement officers to check immigration paperwork, had a negative impact on health outcomes and utilization rates of preventive and routine health care.^{6, 9}

The studies described in this brief report show how immigration-related fears influence the health care-seeking behaviors of documented and undocumented individuals. Having immigrants in the US fall out of care has repercussions for individual and public health, and the state's efforts for "Getting to Zero" (i.e., zero new HIV infections; zero AIDS-related deaths; and zero stigma/discrimination against people living with HIV).

Further research is needed to estimate the impact on prevention and care for immigrant communities affected by HIV—approximately how many are failing to get regular testing, how many newly diagnosed individuals are not being linked to care, and among those previously diagnosed, how many are no longer engaged in care and adherent to treatment? Studies can also aim to learn what steps, if any, clinics that serve immigrant communities are taking to maintain HIV prevention, care and treatment. ❖

See the next page for more information on how your clinic or agency can help patients affected by these challenges.

How can I help my patients?

The following strategies have been suggested by primary care providers and legal resource centers to mitigate fears among immigrant communities and support access to medical care:

- Combine appointments to minimize the number of clinic visits.¹
- Arrange for home delivery of medications when possible and if desired by patients.¹⁰
- Display non-discrimination posters in the clinic.^{1, 11}
- Help patients understand their legal rights by hosting information sessions or providing referrals.^{1, 11}
- Avoid asking patients about immigration status or recording such information in patients' medical charts or billing records.¹¹
- Understand your legal rights and obligations as a health care provider.¹¹

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