HEALTH EQUITY FOR IMMIGRANTS:
Fund Health Coverage for All Washingtonians

Everyone should have access to health care. But federal restrictions and state austerity cuts have left many immigrants without the critical health services they need to thrive and contribute to our state. Recognizing these inequities, the 2021 operating budget directed agencies to pursue a health coverage program by 2024 for people who are ineligible for federal assistance.

This session, the Health Equity for Immigrants Campaign urges the Legislature to fund implementation, outreach and enrollment, and initial programmatic costs for an immigrant health coverage program. The program should start with an Apple Health (Medicaid-like) program for those under 138% of the federal poverty level while agencies work to identify options for those above 138% of the FPL. This approach aligns with the Governor’s proposed 2022 supplemental budget, which included a Medicaid-like program as a first step to achieving affordable coverage for all. Meeting the basic health care needs of all Washingtonians will make every community healthier and our economy stronger.

Health coverage is critical to improving health outcomes, but immigrants are disproportionately uninsured. Washington is home to an estimated 105,000 uninsured immigrants who are integral members of our communities. In a survey of over 5,700 undocumented immigrants in the fall of 2020, 87% lacked health insurance. Survey respondents cited ineligibility and cost as the main barriers to health care access. Without insurance, people are more likely to have poor health status, be hospitalized for preventable conditions and acute illnesses, and die prematurely.

SURVEY RESPONSES

87.1% Do not have health insurance
6.9% From my employer
3.7% Medicaid (Apple Health)
2.0% Other
1.6% From my spouse or partner’s job

“In the last 2 years, have you ever had difficulty paying medical bills?”

65.7% Yes
23.8% No
10.5% Not applicable

“This graph represents responses to a “select all that apply” survey question; the sum of the percentages is greater than 100%.

“In the last 2 years, have you ever had difficulty paying medical bills?”

65.7% Yes
23.8% No
10.5% Not applicable

The pandemic has exacerbated ongoing health disparities. The COVID-19 crisis has intensified longstanding structural inequities, with immigrants and people of color disproportionately contracting, being hospitalized for, and dying from the virus. Undocumented workers are structurally excluded from most of the social safety net, despite many working in critical services throughout this pandemic and paying millions of dollars in taxes annually in Washington state. These communities lack coverage to meet their basic health care needs.

It’s time for Washington to join other states. Immigrants are part of the social fabric of U.S. society and deserve the same opportunities to access quality health care as citizens. Thanks to the Legislature’s action last year, Washington is poised to join peer states – California, Illinois, Oregon, Colorado, and the District of Columbia – that have already acted to cover adult immigrants.

Invest now to prepare for a 2024 program launch. Investing in a state health coverage program now will ensure the necessary infrastructure is in place and the program will have the funding needed to support immigrants’ health care needs no later than January 2024.

More information about the Health Equity for Immigrants Campaign and a current list of endorsing organizations can be found at www.waisn.org/health-equity-for-immigrants.
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We are community leaders, health care providers and advocates who have come together to work to improve access to affordable health care and coverage for all Washington residents. Guided by a community-informed approach, we prioritize equitable access for individuals who are uninsured and underinsured due to immigration status restrictions.

MEMBERS OF THE COALITION

Adult Family Home Council
African Leaders Health Board
Alliance for a Healthy Washington
American Civil Liberties Union of Washington
American Federation of Teachers Washington
American Heart Association
Amerigroup
Area Health Education Center for Western Washington
Asian Counseling & Referral Service
Asian Pacific Islander Coalition of Washington
Balance our Tax Code
Casa Latina
Center for MultiCultural Health
CHARMD Behavioral Health
Children's Alliance
Children's Campaign Fund
Chinese Information & Service Center
Columbia Legal Services
Community Health Network of Washington
Community Health Plan of Washington
Communities in Schools of Benton-Franklin
Communities in Schools of Seattle
Communities in Schools of Whatcom-Skagit
Community Visions
Congolese Integration Network
Economic Opportunity Institute
El Centro de la Raza
Empower Next Generations
Entre Hermanos
Eritrean Health Board
Faith Action Network
Firelands Workers Action/Accion de Trabajadores
Health Care Is a Human Right WA
International Community Health Services
International Organization for Human Rights
Protection & Global Peace
Iraqi/Arab Health Board
Islamic Civic Engagement Project
Jewish Federation of Greater Seattle
Khmer Community of Seattle King County

Latino Community Fund
Latinos Promoting Good Health
Legal Voice
MAPS-AMEN (American Muslim Empowerment Network)
Mother Africa
Muslims for Community, Action and Support (MCAS)
Neighborhood House
Northwest Health Law Advocates
Northwest Immigrant Rights Project
OneAmerica
OneWorld Now
Pacific County Immigrant Support
Pacific Islander Health Board of WA
Peace & Justice Action League of Spokane
Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates
Pro-Choice WA
Raiz of Planned Parenthood of Greater Washington and North Idaho
Rural Health Clinic Association
SEIU 775
Spokane Immigrant Rights Coalition
Wakulima USA
Washington Association for Community Health
Washington Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics
Washington Community Action Network
Washington Healthcare Access Alliance
Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network
Washington State Budget & Policy Center
Washington State Medical Association

*Organizations signed on as of January 10, 2022; please visit www.waisen.org/health-equity-for-immigrants for full list