

Health Equity for Immigrants Campaign: 2023-2025 Biennial Budget Request

The **Health Equity for Immigrants Campaign** includes community organizations, providers and advocates working to improve health access and outcomes for all Washington residents. We work to uplift community-identified priorities and address the gaps in coverage and services that prevent immigrants from receiving equitable access to affordable care.

We are thankful to the Legislature for providing “start-up” funding to expand Medicaid-equivalent health coverage to undocumented adults with income up to 138% FPL and permit access to Exchange plans (with Cascade Care assistance up to 250% FPL). **To ensure these programs launch on time and to provide meaningful affordability assistance, we ask that the 2023 budget include the following:**

- **Programmatic funding for the Medicaid-equivalent program for adults with income up to 138% FPL who are ineligible for federal health care programs.** Without this funding the program will not be implemented by January 1, 2024, and lower-income immigrant communities will not be able to access the care they urgently need.
- **An ongoing annual \$55M appropriation for Cascade Care Savings for individuals up to 250% FPL.** The Legislature has appropriated \$50M in premium assistance only through 2024 and an ongoing \$5M for individuals ineligible for federal premium assistance. If the Health Benefit Exchange’s (HBE) 1332 waiver request is approved, ongoing funding of at least \$55M will be essential to ensure affordability for undocumented residents, as they are ineligible for federal subsidies.
- **Ongoing community-led outreach funds.** Significant community-based outreach that addresses the diverse needs and experiences of the populations that will benefit from these programs, is critical to the programs’ success. The HBE requested outreach and language access funding in its decision package. We support this request and believe additional funding is also needed to ensure the Medicaid-equivalent program also has sufficient outreach resources.
- **Additional funds for state premium subsidies and cost-sharing assistance to make Exchange plans more affordable and achieve parity with assistance for citizens:**
 - **Currently state premium assistance is far too low.** The HBE estimates a \$316 monthly average net premium for people ineligible for federal premium assistance. This premium is too high for individuals under 250% FPL and will greatly limit the ability of eligible individuals to afford these programs. We appreciate the \$5M appropriated in the 2022 budget for individuals ineligible for federal premium assistance but more funding is needed to provide equitable affordability for immigrant communities.
 - **Cost-sharing assistance is authorized but currently lacks funding.** This means that immigrant populations may join the program only to face thousands of dollars in deductibles and other cost sharing in addition to paying nearly \$4,000 in premiums for one year.
- **Funding and direction to address the “5-year bar” population.** Some lawfully present immigrants under 138% FPL are unable to obtain Medicaid coverage due to federal restrictions like the “5-year bar” waiting period. In pursuing health coverage equity, the state must work to create a pathway by 2026 to ensure these lawfully present immigrants are not forced to pay higher health care costs.
- **Funding to allow “waitlisted” immigrants to receive long term care.** We are deeply concerned that the Medicaid-equivalent program will not include long-term care. While we will be advocating for long-term care coverage as part of the Medicaid-equivalent program by 2026 at latest, as a first step we ask that the budget fund slots for the roughly 124 individuals who are currently on the waitlist for the state’s existing long term care program for undocumented immigrants.