

HEALTH EQUITY FOR IMMIGRANTS: Fund Health Coverage for All Washingtonians

Everyone should have access to health care. We urge the Legislature to fully fund equitable immigrant health coverage this session so programs can launch on time by 2024.

Cruel federal restrictions have left many undocumented immigrants without health coverage, leading to poor health status, preventable hospitalizations, and premature death. Immigrants are part of our social fabric in Washington State, contributing to the cultural and economic vitality of our communities. All people deserve opportunities to access health care.

Washington is ready for change. Recognizing the pre-existing inequities that the pandemic amplified, last year's budget provided start-up funds and direction to agencies to launch two state health coverage programs for undocumented adults in Washington by 2024:

- Medicaid-equivalent coverage for adults with income up to 138% FPL; and
- Exchange plans, with cost assistance for those with income up to 250% FPL.

State agencies have made progress toward implementation, including securing federal "1332 waiver" permission for the proposal. This is ground-breaking as it makes Washington the first state in the nation to broker federal approval for our innovative coverage expansion proposal.

It's now time to follow through by fully funding the promised health coverage programs, taking an essential step toward equitable access to health care. To ensure these programs launch by 2024 and provide meaningful affordability assistance, the biennial budget must include on an ongoing basis:

- Full funding for the Medicaid-equivalent program for those under 138% FPL.
- Cascade Care premium assistance for those up to 250% FPL— at minimum the current appropriation of \$55M/year, plus an additional \$10M of premium assistance for immigrants who are ineligible for federal subsidies.
- Outreach & enrollment assistance funds that are community-led and linguistically appropriate.
- And one-time funds so agencies can study remaining equity gaps in the programs, including inequities in Exchange premium and cost-sharing assistance and the exclusion of long-term care benefits.

We can't delay. More than 100,000 of Washington's immigrants are still uninsured, leading to worse health outcomes and mounting medical debt. Left with no viable option, many people are forced to choose between needed care and other basic necessities.

1/4

For 1 in 4 people in Washington who lack health coverage, immigration status is the reason.

2/3

In a 2022 landscape scan of Spanish speaking undocumented immigrants, 2 in 3 reported delaying needed care.

87%

In a 2020 survey of over 5,700 immigrants 87% lacked health coverage, citing cost and ineligibility as primary barriers.

"NOT HAVING ACCESS [TO HEALTHCARE] DELAYED MY TREATMENT AND AS A RESULT MY ILLNESS HAS GOTTEN WORSE AND BECAME INCURABLE."

– Client of Asian Counseling and Referral Service

Washington is falling behind other states. Many of Washington's peer states – like CA, IL, OR, CO, and Washington, D.C. - have already acted to cover adult immigrants. It's time for Washington to continue the strong leadership and values we showed in previous coverage expansions.

We all stand stronger when we protect the health and well-being of everyone in our communities. Please support health equity for immigrants this session.