



IMMIGRATION POLICY CENTER

...providing factual information about immigration and immigrants in America

INCLUDING LEGAL IMMIGRANTS IN HEALTH CARE REFORM: *Just What the Doctor Ordered*

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Who are legal immigrants?

- Each year the U.S. government generously admits immigrants into the country to live, work, reunite with their families, and pursue the American dream. Some have parents, children, or spouses in the United States who sponsored them. Others have been admitted to fill jobs. Still others arrive as refugees or asylees, fleeing persecution in their home country. Many immigrants eventually become U.S. citizens.
- Legal immigrants are citizens-in-waiting. Many legal immigrants are on a path to citizenship. [Between 2006 and 2008](#),¹ over 2 million legal immigrants became U.S. citizens.

Excluding legal immigrants from health care doesn't make sense.

- Just like U.S. citizens, legal immigrants [work and pay taxes](#).² Large numbers of legal immigrants are currently serving in the U.S. military. Legal immigrants are part of our communities, schools, workplaces, and places of worship. It does not make sense to exclude them from paying into the health care system for any amount of time.
- Many legal immigrants live in ["mixed-status families"](#) and have U.S.-citizen children.³ These U.S.-citizen children are often uninsured because their parents work in jobs that do not offer health insurance, or because of fear and confusion about enrolling eligible children in public safety-net programs such as Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP).
- Including legal immigrants in the health care system not only strengthens the system, but is a critical part of their integration into U.S. society. In addition to working, paying taxes, and learning English, legal immigrants should be able to pay their fair share and have affordable health care like everyone else.
- Health care is not a zero-sum game. Including legal immigrants does not mean that U.S. citizens get less care. Making affordable health care available to everyone benefits everyone.

The more people who pay into a system of health insurance, the more everyone benefits.

- It is common sense that the more people who pay into the health care system, the more the costs are spread out over the entire population. Immigrants are eager to pay their fair share and contribute to paying for health reform. In return, immigrants should have affordable health

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insurance like everyone else in America. It's common sense to include immigrants' contributions.

- Access to health care, particularly preventive care services, not only improves public health, but is a cost savings. The [Center for Science in the Public Interest](#) concluded that comprehensive prevention programs are the most economical way to maximize health and minimize health care costs.⁴

As the U.S. population ages, more will be spent on health care for the elderly. The more people paying into the system, the more those costs are spread out.

- Nearly 1 in 5 Americans are age 60 or older, and that demographic is growing quickly.
- According to demographer [Dowell Myers](#), the ratio of seniors (age 65 and older) to working-age adults (25-64) will increase by 67% between 2010 and 2030. Having more, healthy, working-age people paying into the health care system will help finance coverage for everyone.⁵

¹James Lee and Nancy Rytina, [Naturalizations in the United States: 2008](#) (Washington, DC: Office of Immigration Statistics, Department of Homeland Security, March 2009).

²Immigration Policy Center, [The Economics of Immigration Reform: What Legalizing Undocumented Immigrants Could Mean for the U.S. Economy](#) (Washington, DC: American Immigration Law Foundation, April 2009).

³Urban Institute, [Children of Immigrants: Facts and Figures](#) (Washington, DC: May 2006).

⁴Center for Science in the Public Interest, [The Key to Affordable Health Care Reform: Better Health through Prevention](#) (Washington, DC: April 2008).

⁵Dowell Myers, [Thinking Ahead About Our Immigrant Future: New Trends and Mutual Benefits in Our Aging Society](#) (Washington, DC: Immigration Policy Center, American Immigration Law Foundation, January 2008).