

# WITNESS FOR JUSTICE

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## **Immigrants are *NOT* “The Reason”!**

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Popular mythologies and beliefs contribute to perceptions that one of the main reasons for our nation’s failing health care system is the burden on the system by documented and undocumented immigrants. This belief contributed to legislation that limited immigrants’ access to the health care system. In truth, the lack of health insurance and skyrocketing health care costs that render health unaffordable for many contribute to it’s failing. Furthermore, the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation ACT in 1996 placed a five-year ban on eligibility for all immigrants for Medicaid, SCHIP, food stamps, TANF, SSI, and Medicare.

Today several myths have influenced policymaking regarding immigrants and health care. There are five myths according to a report by the Center for American Progress - *Immigrants in the U. S. Health Care System: Five Myths That Misinform the American Public.*

*Myth #1 – U. S. public health insurance programs are overburdened with documented and undocumented immigrants.*

Fact: While low-income citizens depend on Medicaid and SCHIP for health coverage, undocumented immigrants and non-permanent documented immigrants are not eligible for Medicaid or SCHIP.

*Myth #2 – Immigrants consume large quantities of limited health care resources.*

Fact: Immigrants are more likely to be uninsured and therefore less likely to consume health care services. Because of their uninsured status, many immigrants are more likely to wait for their health problems to worsen before seeking care. Having access to primary and preventive care could prevent the illness from worsening and ultimately reduce medical costs.

*Myth #3 – Immigrants come to the United States to gain access to health care services.*

Fact: National Council of La Raza reports that job opportunities across the country are the “magnet” that draws immigrants to the U.S., – not federal incentives such as health care coverage and services. Immigrants are most likely to be employed in industries that do not offer health insurance coverage.

*Myth #4 – Restricting immigrants’ access to the health care system will not affect American citizens.*

Fact: Restricting undocumented and documented immigrants’ access to the U.S. health care system threatens our nation’s public health. Public health policymakers note that when immigrants arrive in the U. S. they are more likely to be healthier than native born individuals, yet as time goes on, their health deteriorates.

*Myth #5 – Undocumented immigrants are “free-riders” in the American health care system.*

Fact: This myth is perhaps the most asserted belief regarding undocumented immigrants and the U.S. health care system. The facts illustrate that undocumented workers contribute more to the revenue stream for U.S. social benefits than they use. Immigrants pay into the Social Security system and Medicare but can never draw upon it. When they do access the system, the costs are shifted to all tax paying citizens.

The increase of documented and undocumented immigrants into the U. S. is not the cause of the failing health care system. The care system is broken in large part because 47 million individuals lack health insurance; health care premiums have increased; and employer-sponsored health insurance has declined. Simply stated, immigrants are not the reason. Moreover, health care is not only a human right, but a human need. We must all work together for a health care system that is inclusive and fair for everyone!

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