

IMMIGRANT FAMILIES IN UTAH:

Addressing Immigrant Children’s Mental Health



Utah has a long-standing commitment to immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers.ⁱ This brief provides an overview of immigrant families and children in our state, current political and policy issues affecting immigrant families, and how this impacts the mental health of Utah immigrant children. By reviewing both short and long-term consequences of current immigration policies on children’s mental health, we conclude with recommendations that can mitigate obstacles Utah immigrant children and families face to their mental and emotional well-being.



Most immigrants in Utah were born in countries from Latin America however, immigrants in Utah are from all over the world including countries in Asia, Europe, and Africaⁱⁱ

Utah is home to about 244,467 immigrants. They make up approximately 8% of our total state population.ⁱⁱⁱ Utah is home to over 879,500 children. Of these, 15,252 are immigrant children and about 152,889 live with at least one immigrant parent.

CHILDREN IN UTAH



Source: Migration Policy Institute, Kids Count^{iv}

Current Political Climate and the Chilling Effect

The Trump Administration has enacted policies and practices which have negatively impacted immigrant and refugee communities in Utah and nationally. These new policies and tactics create additional barriers and have created a so-called “chilling effect” on immigrant families, which has led many families to either choose not to participate or to dis-enroll from participation in public benefits and public programs. As discussed below in more details, families may not be directly affected by new policies, but they still influence families’ decisions and livelihood. From public charge to increased fear of deportation, immigrant parents and their families are being forced to make decisions about their statuses and using the vital programs that their families need and have a right to use. The result is not only fewer resources and support for families in the short-term, but long-term mental health and trauma which can affect children throughout their life course.

PUBLIC CHARGE Visas and green card processing <i>outside</i> the US <small>(DOS - Foreign Affairs Manual (FAM))</small>	PUBLIC CHARGE Visa extensions, status changes, and Green card processing <i>inside</i> the US <small>(DHS Rule)</small>	PUBLIC CHARGE Grounds for deportation <small>(Anticipated DOJ rule)</small>	SPONSOR DEEMING SPONSOR LIABILITY Potential application to more programs <small>(White House, CMS, FNS, & ACF memos)</small>	FEE WAIVER Low-income immigrants lose access to citizenship/ voting rights. <small>(DHS Rule)</small>	FEE WAIVER Removing receipt of means-tested benefits from eligibility list. <small>(DHS Rule)</small>
CITIZENSHIP QUESTION IN CENSUS 2020 Chills civic participation and will limit funding for basic needs programs that depend on accurate count	ACCESS TO PUBLIC HOUSING Closes door to mixed status families		ROLLBACK OF SECTION 1557 Reversing civil rights protections in health care.	DEFERRED ACTION FOR MEDICAL EMERGENCIES Attempts to end protections for people seeking life saving treatment	

Source: The Invisible Wall (September 2019, Protecting Immigrant Families)^v

Changes to the Public Charge Rule

One recent change, which is having a dramatic impact on children’s access to services, including mental health care, is public charge. For the past 100 years, the “Public Charge” admissibility test has been used to identify people who are believed to become a ‘public charge’ or dependent on the government as their main source of support.^{vi} The new rule dramatically strays away from the original definition by favoring wealthy families and punishing low income families.

The public charge rule will take effect on October 15th, however the chilling effect on children and families in Utah can already be seen since the rule was leaked in January of 2017. Although only a small number of immigrant families will actually be subject to the rule change, families are already being negatively affected by this rule that is forcing families to choose between access to vital programs that are important for their family’s wellbeing and their immigration statuses.



Almost 2 in every 5 immigrants are naturalized U.S. citizens^{vii}

The rule specifically applies to Visa, Green Card or Legal Permanent Resident **applicants** who are more likely to require more than a minimal amount of cash assistance, health, nutrition, and housing programs. It hurts families by weighing against those with more children, seniors, and those with limited English proficiency, limited formal education, by using a totality of circumstances tests.

The final rule thus expanding the types of benefits that would consider someone a “public charge.” And targets programs that families and children use for their basic needs including:

-  Cash assistance under SSI, TANF or similar state, local or tribal programs
-  Medicaid (exceptions include emergency services, coverage of children under age 21 and coverage for pregnant women)
-  Public Housing, Section 8 housing vouchers, and Project-Based Section 8
-  Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

➔ The “Chilling Effect” refers to the fear and confusion that is causing people to disenroll or forgo benefits or programs that they are eligible for.

These programs have historically been used to support families in need. By dramatically changing the way they are used to determine if a person is a “public charge” it has scared Utah families from accessing programs that they are legally entitled to receive.

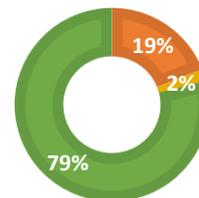
This chilling effect will largely negatively affect low-income families who may be scared away from seeking the services, programs, and resources they need. This is especially harmful to children because uninsured children will be less likely to visit a doctor’s office, receive their well child visits, or visit the dentist office^{viii}

Family Separations

Under the Trump Administration, other policies that have increased deportations are the executive orders that were signed when President Trump first came into office. They granted immigration agents more power to detain and deport non-criminal immigrants.^{ix} This is a rollback from the Obama era guidance that focused more on deporting those with criminal backgrounds. This past year, another policy shift that has changed deportations is expedited removal where those who are living farther than 100 miles from the border could

CHILDREN (UNDER 18) WITH UNDOCUMENTED IMMIGRANT PARENTS

■ Undocumented ■ LPR & Other Immigration Statuses ■ U.S. Citizen



Source: Migration Policy Institute

also be subjected to a faster deportation.^x This means that more undocumented immigrants could be subject to deportation, and to faster deportations.

When parents or guardians are deported, children suffer tremendously. The arrest of an immigrant parent or guardian can result in an instant and severe loss of family income. According to the Migration Policy Institute, most children living with undocumented parents are U.S. citizens (about 79%), a small portion are Legal Permanent Residents (LPR) or have other immigration statuses themselves (2%), and about 19% of children with undocumented parents are also undocumented.^{xi} This means, the majority of the children who are impacted would qualify to receive resources that could support them with the loss of parent or guardian due to deportation, but may not receive the resources they need because of the chilling effect. For those children who do not qualify, the need for resources and services could be even greater.

Deported parents or guardians are most often the breadwinners of their family.^{xii} Deportations usually creates more instability when families cannot pay for their bills, housing, or food. Whether or not the parent is eventually deported, it often comes at the cost of food and housing insecurity from lost time at work and fear of using public support.

Children in Immigrant Families



*Almost one in five children in Utah have one immigrant parent in their household.^{xiii}
For children in low income families, it is about 1 in 4.*

Impact of Trauma on Children

People's experiences during their childhood has a dramatic impact on their lives as adults for immigrants and nonimmigrants alike. This concept of ACEs or "Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) is used to describe all types of abuse, neglect, and other potentially traumatic experiences that occur to people under the age of 18."^{xiv} A study about ACEs between 1995-1997 and subsequent studies done after, have found that childhood experiences have lasting lifelong impacts on the health of adults from life expectancy, behavioral problems, and physical and mental health.

Among the findings, those adults with six or more ACEs had a 20-year lower life expectancy those without any ACEs.^{xv} Alongside this, growing research has found the negative impact that deportations and family separations have on the lives of immigrant children.^{xvi} The negative impacts that childhood experiences have on adulthood shows how troubling the impact of deportations, family separations, constant anxiety, and fear have on immigrant children.



In Utah, about 66,933 children live in a household with at least one undocumented immigrant.^{xvii}

Short and Long-term Consequences for Immigrant Children's Mental Health

Access to Health Coverage and Care

Studies show that having health coverage is linked to better health, educational, and economic outcomes. When children have health coverage, they used more health care services and less medical debt.^{xviii} When children have health coverage, it improves their access to the care they need from primary care, preventative care, immunizations, and mental health services. Utah is one of nine states that is moving in the wrong direction in terms of health coverage for children.^{xix} Utah has one of the highest rates of uninsured children in the country at 7% or 71,000 children. When children lack access to health coverage, they are also less likely to have access to affordable mental health coverage.

Moreover, this current climate of fear is also affecting children's ability to access preventive services, to help address a physical or mental health condition before it escalates. Community health centers report more families are afraid to come in for basic prevention appointments, because of fear of interacting with immigration officials. There are also increased reports of children missing school, a critical place for children's physical and mental health care needs to be identified and referred to treatment.

Impact of Trauma and Hidden Suffering

Immigrant children face unique challenges and it is important to recognize the long lasting and negative effects deportations and family separations have on them. When children face high amounts of stress, fear, and anxiety they cannot come into their classrooms ready to learn or live their lives during childhood and adulthood to their full potential.

When children are impacted by Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE), deportations, and separations, it has a lasting effect on them and their families. One study found that children of detained or deported parents were rated by parents and clinicians as having a higher rate of internalizing problems and having negative moods and emotions compared to children of Legal Permanent Residents and parents who had no contact with ICE.^{xx} The high levels of stress and anxiety have lasting and serious effects on children's physical and emotional development. It can affect their brain development, ability to manage their emotions and alter how they learn.^{xxi}

Whether their parents are deported or not, there is fear and anxiety that lingers throughout immigrant families and their surrounding communities. While deportations and immigration issues effect families, it has a much bigger structural and social traumatic consequences. This collective or community trauma highlights the necessity to create interventions at the personal and community level for immigrant families.^{xxii}

Policy Recommendations

To support immigrant families, we must support policies that will help more children obtain health coverage so they can have access to the care they need for their physical and mental health.



Cover All Kids: 100% Kids Coverage Campaign

Currently, about 71,000 children in Utah are uninsured. We must support policies to ensure all children have coverage and can obtain the care they need. For immigrant children and families, it is important to ***cover all children regardless of immigration status***. Doing so will create a more welcoming environment for all children in Utah to access health care without the fear that public benefits like health insurance would affect their immigration status.^{xxiii}

Invest in Increased Community Support and Outreach for Immigrant Families

By investing, we are better able to serve and assess the needs and about what community support and outreach works best for immigrant families. For example, it is important to invest in outreach material and resources that targets specific immigrant communities for public programs like CHIP and Medicaid to ensure they are receiving accurate and culturally sensitive information. Additionally, dollars should be invested in Community Health Workers and Peer Support Specialists who serve as important links between health services and community members.^{xxiv} As trusted members of their community, they can provide information, resources, community education, and more to create a better delivery system for children and families.

Support and Strengthen School-Based Care

Ensure that all children can access counseling and care and build trusted support networks with peers and adults.^{xxv} While improving school-based care, it is important to include care after school and develop out-of-school time counseling and resources. For immigrant students and their families, it is also important to develop and strengthen this care in places they feel comfortable accessing like Community Learning Centers, schools, and other trusted spaces.

Expand Mental and Behavioral Health Services for Children and Parents

All children should have access to comprehensive mental health screenings and care. Well-child visits are important opportunities to assess children’s physical and mental health. The earlier we start, the more likely we can prevent disorders from occurring or escalating. At least 14% of all children in Utah report one or more mental, behavioral or developmental conditions, according to 2011-2012 data. Investment in early mental health promotion and intervention strengthens outcomes for children, families and communities.^{xxvi} For parents, it is important for them to also be screened during well-care visits to assess family history and provide comprehensive care.^{xxvii} For immigrant children and their parents, it is important to invest in trauma informed care and cultural competency for counselors, therapists, and other healthcare workers.

State and Local Leaders Must Voice Their Opposition to Current Political Climate

In order to combat the fear, we call on elected and appointed officials to condemn the anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies that harm our community. State and local leaders are in unique positions to voice their opposition and support measures that will combat the fear and push back by enacting policy solutions like the ones listed above, in our state.

Utah should be a place where all families and children thrive regardless of their immigration status, geography or place of birth. Immigrants and refugees in Utah help us create a stronger and better state. The policies and laws in our state and country should reflect the values we hold.

Defining Terms

Undocumented Immigrant: Living in the U.S. without legal authorization (unlawful presence). Also referred to as unauthorized.

Latinx: Hispanic, Latino, or Latinx (the x is used as a gender-neutral form of Latina or Latino).

Mixed-Status Family: Families with at least one citizen and one non-citizen member (Examples of non-citizen include but are not limited to: Legal Permanent Residents (green card holders), temporary visas, Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), Temporary Protected Status (TPS), and undocumented immigrants).

Immigrant Children: Are defined as children who are foreign-born, or children born in the United States who live with at least one parent who is foreign-born.

Immigrant Family: Includes children under age 18 who are foreign-born or reside with at least one foreign-born parent. Foreign-born includes both naturalized U.S. citizens and noncitizen residents.

“Dreamers”: Dreamers refers to immigrant children who came to the U.S. before the age of 18 and are living without legal authorization (unlawful presence). The term comes from the Dream Act Legislation, first introduced in 2001.

DACA Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) is a two-year worker permit that allows immigrant youth to work legally in the U.S.



The mission of Voices for Utah Children is to make Utah a place where all children thrive. We start with a basic question, “Is it good for kids?” We believe that every child deserves the opportunity to reach their potential.

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