

Immigrant-Friendly Policies Improve Children's Health Outcomes

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Having undocumented immigrant parents affects multiple dimensions of a child's health and well-being, likely due to limited access to resources and the ever-present anxiety about the future that undocumented immigrants face. The effects of growing up with undocumented parents, however, differs state by state and locality by locality depending on local immigration-related policies.

Two such policies are whether states permit undocumented immigrants to get driver's licenses and whether localities or states limit local law enforcements' participation in federal immigration enforcement (i.e., sanctuary policies). Having a driver's license allows parents to transport their children to health care appointments. Sanctuary policies may lessen undocumented immigrant parents' fear of accessing healthcare for their children.

1 in 4 U.S. children are children of immigrants

5.6 million U.S. Children live with an undocumented immigrant parent who lacks permission to live or work in the U.S.

5 million of these children are U.S.-born citizens living with undocumented parents

Do immigrant-friendly state and local policies increase the chances that children of immigrants receive adequate preventive health care?

We evaluated the impact of these policies on access to preventive health care, including whether children in immigrant families:

- (1) have a usual source of care (USC) provider;
- (2) have unmet medical needs;
- (3) visited the dentist in the past six months; or
- (4) had recent well-child visits.

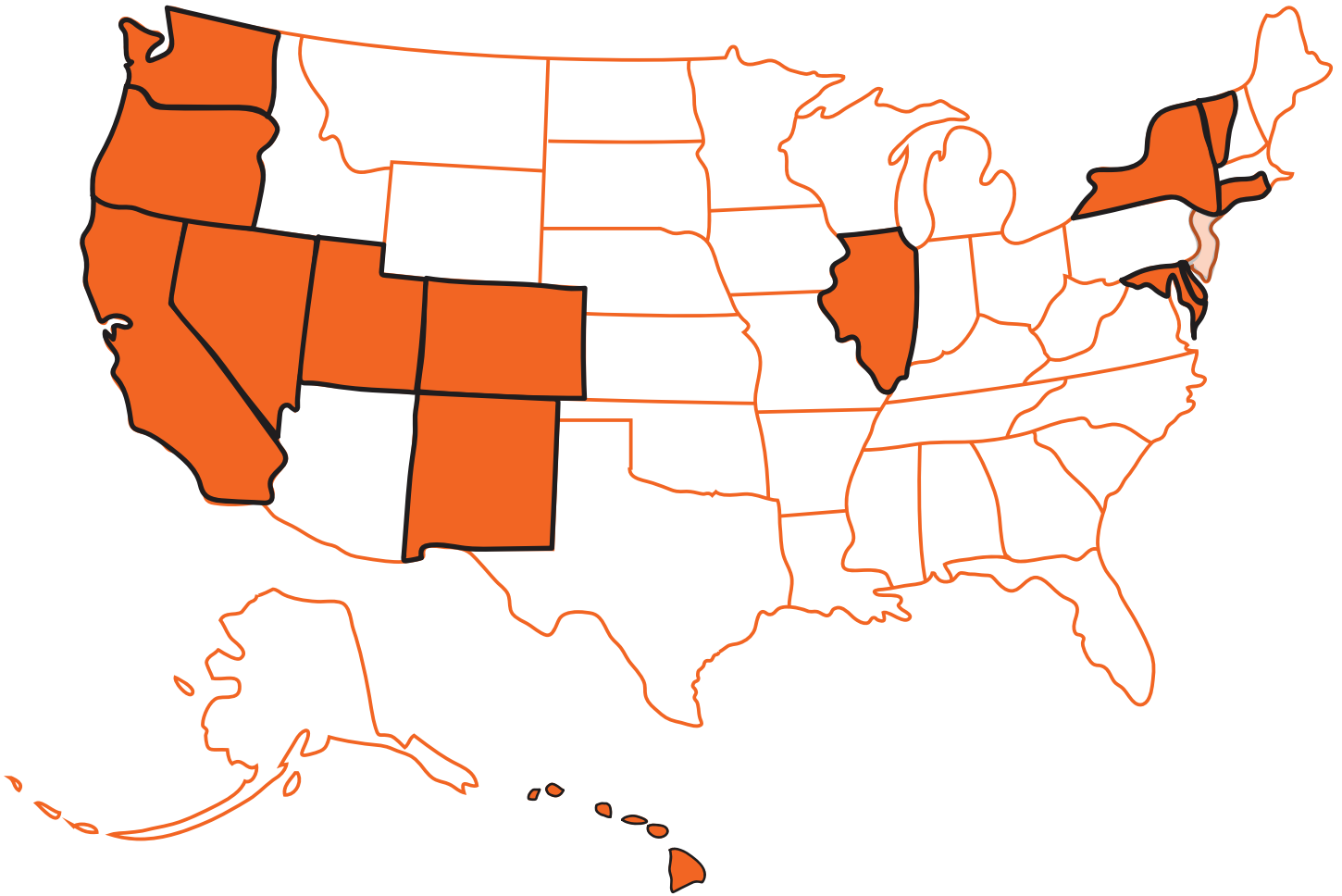
Immigrant-friendly policies improved preventive health outcomes among children of immigrants. Driver's licenses increased the likelihood that children in immigrant households, especially Latino children, have a USC provider and had a recent well child visit. It reduced the likelihood of having unmet medical needs. Sanctuary policies increased the likelihood of having a USC provider and having visited a dentist.

The Policy Landscape

Driver's Licenses Until 1993, undocumented immigrants could legally obtain a driver's license in all 50 states. California was the first state to restrict driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants, with other states quickly following suit. By 2011 only three states (Utah, New Mexico, and Washington) allowed undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver's license. In 2012, some states changed course and began allowing licenses for undocumented immigrants. Currently 15 states and the District of Columbia allow driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants (see map).

Sanctuary Policies Starting in 2011, some states, cities, and counties passed policies to limit cooperation with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Secure Communities' detainer requests. These local policies have colloquially been referred to as a type of "sanctuary policy."

States Permitting Drivers Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants



The Secure Communities program was launched in 2008 under President Bush and expanded nationally under President Obama. Secure Communities requires local law enforcement agencies to submit fingerprints of arrestees for checks against Department of Homeland Security databases. If an immigration violation is found, ICE officials may issue a detainer request to local law enforcement to hold an individual so ICE can take custody. Secure Communities led to deportations of many non-citizen immigrants with minor or no criminal convictions.

In 2014, Secure Communities was replaced with the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP), which focused on detaining and deporting immigrants who were national security threats, had been convicted of serious crimes, or were recent arrivals in the U.S. In 2017 PEP was ended and Secure Communities reinstated. Sanctuary policies have continued to expand since then.

Conclusions

Sanctuary policies and policies that allow for driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants increase the chances that children of immigrants receive adequate medical and dental care. Having a USC provider may lead to cost savings as utilization of emergency care is reduced, and vaccination rates increase, thereby decreasing chances of disease outbreaks. Improving access to preventive care is particularly important during an epidemic, like COVID-19. If undocumented immigrants are afraid to access health care, it could worsen the epidemic, as well as threaten their lives.

References

Report: "Do States' Immigrant-Friendly Policies Improve the Health of Children of Immigrants? The Impact of Driver's License Policies for Undocumented Immigrants and "Sanctuary" Policies on Access and Use of Health Care" by Heather Koball and Seth Hartig