

September 9, 2021

The Shriver Center on Poverty Law (Shriver Center), the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (ICIRR) and the Healthy Illinois Campaign support U.S. Representative Pramila Jayapal's (D-WA) two bills that remove long-standing eligibility barriers denying immigrants access to federal health coverage pathways and safety net programs:

1. [Lifting Immigrant Families Through Benefits Access Restoration \(LIFT the BAR\) Act](#), will be introduced soon and
2. [Health Equity and Access Under the Law \(HEAL\) for Immigrant Families Act](#), was introduced in May.

The Shriver Center, ICIRR and the Healthy Illinois Campaign call on the Illinois Congressional Delegation to support both LIFT the BAR Act and the HEAL Act by signing on as a co-sponsor to both bills.

The [LIFT the BAR Act would, among other things:](#)

- Remove the five-year exclusion or waiting period--also known as the five-year bar--created in 1996, when Congress passed restrictive welfare and immigration legislation preventing immigrants with legal permanent residence status (LPRs) (also known as green card holders) from accessing critical federal benefits, including:
  - Medicaid (approximately 30,000 Illinoisans with LPR status less than five years would qualify for Federal Medicaid, if not for the five-year bar),
  - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP),
  - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and
  - the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program.
- Redefine "qualified noncitizens," a term used to define eligibility for many Federal programs, to include any individuals who are lawfully present in the U.S.
- Clarify that Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) status qualifies as lawfully present status, allowing DACA recipients to purchase coverage from the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) insurance marketplace, including its premium tax credits and cost-sharing reductions. [Illinois is home to 32,730 DACA recipients.](#)

[The HEAL Act would, among many things,](#) also remove the five-year bar for Federal Medicaid, and:

- Eliminate the outdated list of "qualified" immigrants for Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to open eligibility to all federally authorized immigrants.
- Allow DACA recipients and undocumented immigrants to purchase ACA marketplace coverage. [Illinois is home to 182,000 uninsured, undocumented adults, approximately 167,000 of whom have household incomes at or less than 400% FPL,](#) the threshold for ACA premium tax credits.
- Provide DACA recipients access to federal Medicaid.

LIFT the BAR and the HEAL Act would remove these barriers to coverage and bring federal dollars to Illinois. Federal Medicaid dollars are more important than ever as the Pritzker administration is seeking to ensure that all Illinoisans have an affordable pathway to comprehensive health coverage and has supported two expansions--led by [the Healthy Illinois Campaign](#)--of exclusively state-funded Medicaid for immigrants--one in 2020 for low-income immigrant seniors age 65 and older and the second expansion this year (set to start by May of 2022) for older adults aged 55-64 years old. These recent expansions are in addition to the previous expansion of exclusively state-funded coverage via Illinois's *All Kids* program to children who are undocumented. All these expansions would be less costly to the state if the federal government removed the five-year bar and ineligibility for DACA recipients for federal Medicaid and removed the barriers to DACA recipients and undocumented individuals for the ACA marketplace.

[Immigrants are disproportionately harmed by COVID-19](#), with higher infection, hospitalization, and death rates than non-Hispanic whites. A [Families USA Report](#) revealed that in the first 6 months of the pandemic, Illinois could have avoided 2,371 COVID-19 fatalities if everyone in the state had comprehensive health coverage and an additional 85,801 COVID-19-contractions by could have been prevented if all people were insured. Moreover, the current federal exclusions of immigrants from coverage eligibility, makes immigrants at higher risk for medical bankruptcy and excessive out-of-pocket spending, and delayed diagnosis of illness and conditions. For instance, the [average cost of hospital care for COVID-19 patients](#) without insurance or who receive out-of-network care varies greatly by age – from \$51,389 for patients between 21- and 40-years-old to \$78,569 for patients between 41 and 60 years old. LIFT the BAR and HEAL Acts, by removing the exclusions from eligibility for immigrants, increases access to health coverage which decreases the risk of both medical bankruptcy and serious courses of illness.

Being uninsured delays care and testing, translating into potentially avoidable emergency room visits and hospitalizations, which in turn translates into sky-rocketing uncompensated care costs borne by Illinois safety net provider system. In just one example, colon cancer is one of the deadliest diseases if left untreated or diagnosed at a late stage. However, [if detected early, through preventive screening \\$3,784, it is often very treatable](#) – and much less expensive than if treated at stages 1-4 (\$150,000 plus). In 2019, an estimated [\\$944.6 million in charity care was provided by Illinois's 200 hospitals](#). LIFT the BAR and HEAL Acts, by removing the exclusions from eligibility for immigrants, addresses the exponential increase in uncompensated care currently being shouldered by community health centers and safety net hospitals. Providing federal reimbursement to health care providers for their current uninsured patients will free up exclusively state or other dollars for them to invest in their infrastructure and other patients.

[Immigrants are a vital part of Illinois's heartbeat](#): roughly two in ten Illinoisans are immigrants. In 2019, immigrant-led households in Illinois paid \$13.4 billion in federal taxes, \$8.0 billion in state and local taxes and infused \$50.2 billion in spending power to our economy. We cannot continue to accept health care disparities and inaccessibility to federal safety net programs as normal for so many of our fellow Illinoisans. Stand with us and support LIFT the BAR and HEAL by signing on as a co-sponsor.

Sincerely,

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