Health Conditions and Health Care among California’s Undocumented Immigrants

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California has been expanding Medi-Cal to undocumented immigrants by age group

Jan 2014
ACA Medi-Cal expansion (excludes undocumented immigrants)

Jan 2020
Medi-Cal expansion to undocumented ages 19–25

Jan 2024
Medi-Cal expansion to undocumented ages 26–49

May 2016
Medi-Cal expansion to undocumented children (ages 0–18)

May 2022
Medi-Cal expansion to undocumented ages 50+
Community health centers are key access points for low-income, immigrant Californians

- Community clinic visits data offers insights into undocumented immigrant health
- Study population includes Medi-Cal and undocumented adults
- Los Angeles County has the largest number of undocumented immigrants of any California county
Undocumented immigrants are less likely to have preventive-care-coded visits . . .

Undocumented status and likelihood of a visit being coded for preventive care

Source: ADVANCE network electronic health records from OCHIN’s community health centers.
... and this difference is consistent among age groups

Undocumented status and likelihood of a visit being coded for preventive care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>LA County</th>
<th>Statewide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>-25%</td>
<td>-12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–49</td>
<td>-18%</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19–25</td>
<td>-16%</td>
<td>-9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ADVANCE network electronic health records from OCHIN's community health centers.
However, undocumented patients get certain preventive services at rates at least as high as Medi-Cal patients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Statewide</th>
<th>LA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mammogram (women over 50)</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colonoscopy (adults over 45)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stool colon cancer test (adults over 45)</td>
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<td>□</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shingles vaccine (adults over 50)</td>
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- More likely if undocumented
- No significant difference
Undocumented immigrants need—and use—more behavioral health

Undocumented status and likelihood of a visit being for behavioral health

Source: ADVANCE network electronic health records from OCHIN’s community health centers.
Likelihood of using behavioral health is strong across all ages, particularly young adults in LA

Undocumented status and likelihood of a visit being for behavioral health (%)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Age group</th>
<th>LA County</th>
<th>Statewide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>37%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26–49</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19–25</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: ADVANCE network electronic health records from OCHIN’s community health centers.
Experts in LA highlight the high demand for counseling services

- Trauma related to migration, domestic violence, or experiencing war in their home countries
- Clinics struggle to find fully bilingual providers who can offer counseling in Spanish or other languages
“A good example would be the Fourth of July. If [a patient] went through a war-torn country, and they’re hearing [fireworks]. They might not understand why they have a headache. It might be the smell, too, because fireworks emit a smell, and it might remind them of past experiences with war and how gunshots smelled in their home country.”

—LA interviewee
LA experts highlighted barriers to health care access for undocumented residents

- Fear and confusion about federal immigration policy
- Limited information and misinformation, transportation and language needs, high cost of living in LA
The final Medi-Cal expansion will affect enrollment and demand for services

- Older adults may show more interest in applying than younger adults
- Expect higher demand for behavioral health services
Easing barriers can help prepare for the upcoming expansion

- Accurate information, enrollment assistance, and language services will be essential
- Clinics would benefit from resources to hire more staff, especially bi- or multilingual staff
- Expand language and technological support for telehealth
Acknowledgement

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