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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Health of Mexican Immigrants Become Increasingly Vulnerable as Access to Affordable Medical Services Declines**

#### **Report Finds High Prevalence of Diabetes and Fatal Accidents on the Job**

**(October 7, 2008)** – The University of California and the National Population Council of the Government of Mexico (CONAPO) today released a study on migration trends, insurance coverage, and health status of Latino immigrants residing and working in the United States, with a special focus on those born in Mexico.

The milestone report, announced this morning at a press conference during the *Eighth Annual Binational Health Week*, highlights trends in healthcare service use and the prevalence of illness among Latino immigrants. The new report, *Migration and Health: Latinos in the United States*, also charts the labor market status of Latino immigrants and describes how their participation in high risk and low-skilled jobs exacerbates existing health vulnerabilities given their low rates of health insurance coverage.

Over half of all Mexican immigrants in the U.S. have no health insurance. The numbers who are uninsured doubled over the past 13 years to 6.7 million people. This increase, as the study's authors point out, can be partially attributed to "a system that delegates much of the responsibility of providing health insurance to employers, who tend not to provide benefits for low-paid workers." Also at play are new legal obstacles to immigration that have "particularly, and negatively, affected the Mexican immigrant population's ability to obtain health care coverage." As a result, Latin American immigrants, particularly Mexicans, often do not obtain treatment for serious health problems, such as diabetes, that commonly affect Latinos.

"The continued good health of migrants is an asset for the migrants themselves, their families, and their communities of origin and destination. Thus, migrants' health is the joint responsibility of the countries of origin and destination and taking care of it requires strategies and programs with a binational effort," stated Xochitl Castaneda, Director of the Health Initiative of the Americas at the University of California, Berkeley.

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## **Key findings of the study include:**

**The U.S. is home to an estimated 11.8 million Mexican immigrants** (documented and undocumented combined). Young adults are the most common migrants, which has helped reduced demographic aging in the U.S.

**Workers from Mexico and other Latin American countries contribute substantially to meeting the U.S. demand for unskilled labor**, with 85% of recently arrived workers from Mexico settling into low wage jobs in the unskilled service occupations, manufacturing, and construction.

The primary reason that Mexicans come to the U.S. is to seek work, not to obtain health or social services. Thus, **policies that limit access to public health programs based on citizenship have not deterred migration but have exacerbated health inequalities.**

**Over half of all Mexican immigrants living in the U.S. have no health insurance.** More than two-thirds of those who have been in the U.S. for fewer than 10 years lack health insurance, and two-thirds of all low-income Mexican immigrants are also without coverage.

**The vast majority of uninsured Latino adult immigrants participate in the U.S. labor market.** The concentration of Latino immigrants in jobs with disproportionate safety and health risks – such as construction and agriculture – further exacerbates their vulnerability given their lack of health insurance. Seventy-four percent of Mexican immigrants working in construction and 62% of those working in agriculture are uninsured.

**Almost two in three Mexican immigrants do not have a regular doctor that they see**, resulting in extremely low rates of medical service use. A third of Mexican-born children and teenagers have no place to receive regular medical care. Nearly half of this population fails to meet the minimum standard for regular medical check-ups.

Despite the self-selection of immigrants who tend to be healthier upon arrival than the local population, evidence shows that over time, **Latin American immigrants, particularly Mexicans, experience a high prevalence of several chronic and infectious diseases**—including diabetes—that require adequate access to health services.

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