



PRESS RELEASE

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Major New Study Tracks Mexican Migrants' Health Issues and Compares To Longstanding Migrants, U.S. Born Mexican-Americans and U.S. Born Whites

Los Angeles, CA (October 13, 2005) The University of California and the National Population Council (CONAPO) of the Government of Mexico today released the findings of a landmark study on health trends of Mexican immigrants living in the United States. The findings were released this morning at a press conference held at the Mexican General Consulate of Los Angeles as part of the *Fifth U.S.-Mexico Binational Health Week*.

The new report, *Mexico-United States Migration Health Issues* describes the volume, trends, and characteristics of Mexican migration to the United States. In addition, immigrants' health concerns, such as the availability of medical insurance coverage and the access to and use of medical services are analyzed. For the first time, differences between recent immigrants, those who have lived 10 or more years in the U.S., Mexican-Americans, and U.S. born whites are analyzed using U.S and Mexican data sources.

"This binational study represents an important step between the two countries, and provides us with data and information that can help us shape strategies and policies to improve the health of migrants living in the United States," stated Elena Zúñiga, Secretary General of the National Population Council (CONAPO) of the Government of Mexico. Key findings of the study include:

In 2004, Mexicans born in Mexico and residing in the U.S. numbered 10.2 million, compared with 879,000 in 1970. In 2004, descendents of Mexican immigrants grew to 26.8 million from 5.4 million in 1970.

Health insurance coverage for Mexicans is obtained primarily through private insurance (32 percent). Just 15 percent of this population participates in governmental health insurance programs, representing 3 percent of the U.S. population using these programs.

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ADD ONE—Major New Study Tracks Mexican Migrants' Health

Immigrants from Mexico use emergency rooms about half as often as the U.S.-born, whether white or Mexican American.

“Given the occupations that Mexican immigrants are most likely to hold, they are also expected to experience more accidents or illnesses that require emergency room use, stated Xóchitl Castaneda, Director, California Mexico Health Initiative. “However, the costs of emergency room use by immigrants appear relatively low, despite their occupational risks and low rates of having a usual source of care,” concluded Ms. Castaneda.

Of the 10.2 million Mexican immigrants living in the United States, more than half (5.9 million persons) do not have health insurance. This number increases among recent immigrants of whom 70 percent lack coverage.

Significant inequalities are observed in the same occupations. For example, on those associated with cleaning, maintenance, and food preparation, 77% of the recent Mexican immigrants have no health insurance, compared with only 30% of the U.S.-born white. Similarly, in professional occupations, 44% of recent Mexican immigrants are uninsured compared to 8% of the U.S.-born white population.

Within Mexican families, inequalities vis-à-vis access to medical insurance is also found. Of the 3.9 million Mexican-headed households, 2.7 million (69%) include members under 18 years of age. In 27% of Mexican-headed households, none of the minors are insured. Insured children tend to be those born in the U.S., while often those without coverage were born in Mexico.

Data reveal difficulties faced by Mexican immigrants in maintaining their health and well-being. For example, **over one-third of recent immigrant adults had not seen a doctor in the past 2 years**, 5 times the rate of U.S.-born whites. While recent immigrants report good health, even better than that of Mexican Americans and native white populations, long-stay migrants report worse health in a number of indicators.

Recently immigrated women are almost 3 times less likely to have pap smears than U.S.-born white women; and are almost 2 times less likely to have mammograms than U.S.-born white women. Recent Mexican immigrant women have the lowest rate of obtaining pap smears: one-third of women age 18-64 did not have the test in the previous 3 years, the recommended period.

ADD TWO—Major New Study Tracks Mexican Migrants' Health

Researchers acknowledge that Mexican migration to the U.S. will remain a vital public issue and so will concerns regarding this population's health. They point out that despite basic shortcomings in the social services and other difficulties faced by immigrants, the notable growth in the U.S. Mexican population in recent years suggests that the restriction of rights and social benefits, including health care insurance, has not deterred migration.

“Good health benefits immigrant workers and has larger social and economic implications for both countries,” concluded Elena Zúñiga, Secretary General of the National Population Council (CONAPO) of the Government of Mexico.

“Without good health, Mexican immigrants cannot work in physically demanding occupations where many are concentrated, such as agriculture and construction. The correlation of decline in health status with length of residence in the U.S. has been found in this study and many others. The health of immigrants, particularly the poorest and most mobile, is therefore a concern requiring bilateral attention and resources and that is why we funded this important study,” stated Mario Gutierrez, Program Director of Rural and Agricultural Health for The California Endowment.

The production of the report was made possible through the binational collaborative work of two leading research institutions: The National Population Council (CONAPO) of the Government of Mexico and the University of California. The California Endowment and CONAPO funded the new report, *Mexico-United States Migration Health Issues*.

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