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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Use

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Major Report Documents Causes of Decline in Health of Mexican Immigrants

Low pay and dangerous work are the two main contributors

Mexican immigrants living and working in the United States often have the lowest paying and most dangerous jobs, are more likely to be injured at work, and earn so little they can't afford health insurance.

These are some of the most relevant findings of the landmark report jointly issued by the University of California and the Mexican Secretariat of Health, and co-authored by Steven Wallace, associate director of the Center for Health Policy Research at the UCLA School of Public Health, Xóchitl Castañeda of the Health Initiative of the Americas, and Sylvia Guendelman of the UC Berkeley School of Public Health.

Titled "Migration, Health and Work: Facts behind the Myths," the study describes the health risks that working in the U.S. poses for Latino immigrant workers, especially Mexicans. The report is being issued in conjunction with the Seventh Binational Health Week (BHW), an annual week-long series of health-promotion and health-education activities geared toward the most vulnerable and difficult to reach Latino-origin populations. This year's BHW will kick-off with a 10:00am press conference at Los Angeles City Hall. An international delegation of six countries, including dignitaries of Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Colombia are participating. Some of the key representatives are Dr. Angel Cordova, Secretary of Health, Mexico; Martha Altolaguirre, Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Guatemala; Margarita Escobar, Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs, El Salvador; Carlos Rico, Under-Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Mexico; and Jaifa Metzger, representing the government of Colombia. From California, Rosario Marin, California Secretary of State and Consumer Services Agency; Senator Gilbert Cedillo, California Legislature; and Dr. Wyatt R. Hume, Provost and Executive Vice-President of the University of California are some of the key players.

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The report finds that the conditions in which Mexican immigrants often work pose increased health risks. Some occupations employ disproportionately high numbers of Mexican immigrants, such as agriculture and construction, and also pay low-wages, rarely offer health insurance, and are often characterized by a higher rate of work-related injury and death than other professions.

Specifically, the report has found that:

-- Two-thirds of all Mexican immigrant men work in construction and service jobs. California relies even more on Mexican immigrant labor than the nation as a whole.

--Most Americans get access to health insurance through their jobs, but sixty-eight percent of Mexican men working in construction and service jobs have no health insurance, while 52 percent of Mexican women in such jobs lack health insurance.

--In 2006, Mexican immigrants accounted for 44 percent of all work-related deaths.

--Farm work, where a large percentage of Mexican immigrant workers are employed, is one of the most dangerous occupations in the country; while just three percent of the national workforce, farm work represents 13 percent of all occupational deaths.

Past policy that aims to restrict immigrants' access to health and social services reflects the desire to discourage migration. However, the researchers note that Latino immigrants come to the United States to work, not to make disproportionate use of social services, and depriving them of basic health services has serious implications for the Latino community and the ability of immigrant workers to contribute economically in the United States and their countries of origin.

"This report shows the health risks that Mexican immigrant workers take on in supporting the U.S. economy through their labor," said Steven Wallace, coauthor of the report and the associate director of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

"Given that Mexican immigrants are often taking the most dangerous, lowest paying jobs in the economy, it is unconscionable that they should also experience such exclusion from employer sponsored health insurance," said Xóchitl Castañeda, director of the Health Initiative of the Americas. "The deterioration of the health of these individuals over time is in part due to the jobs recent immigrants are likely to perform."

"This study represents an important step in determining the causes behind the deteriorating health of immigrant workers in the United States and provides us with data and information that can help us shape strategies and policies to remedy the health inequities experienced by this population," stated Dr. Robert Ross, President and CEO of The California Endowment, a sponsor of the study.

The production of the report was made possible through the collaborative work of researchers from the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research and the UC Berkeley School of Public Health, and was funded by The California Endowment and the Mexican Secretariat of Health.

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