

## UC releases report debunking myths about immigration, health

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BERKELEY — The University of California, Berkeley, released a landmark report on Monday providing data that suggest immigrants, particularly of Latin American origin, significantly contribute to the work force but are harmed by lack of health care coverage.

This comes just days before the U.S. Congress failed to override President George W. Bush's veto of SCHIP, a health insurance plan to cover low-income children as well as undocumented immigrants.

The University of California, Los Angeles, and UC Berkeley schools of public health, the UC's office of the President and the Health Initiative of the Americas are the three agencies that conducted the research for "Migration, Health and Work: The Facts Behind the Myths," using U.S. census data and with financial assistance from the California Endowment and Mexico's Ministry of Health.

"What this report is showing, unfortunately, is that immigrants and those who come from Mexico and Latin American countries are absorbing the most difficult jobs and are facing the highest job related deaths," said Xochitl Castaneda, director of the Health Initiative of the Americas, a program of the UC Office of the President.

Mexican immigrants make up nearly one-third of U.S. population, but because they are usually employed in dangerous occupations — like farming and construction — they account for 44 percent of all immigrant workers who die on the job or as a result of an on-the-job injury, the report states.

Professor Steven P. Wallace, associate director of the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, School of Public Health, described some of the findings of the research.

"Despite taking the large number of dangerous jobs in the country, (immigrants) are not offered the basic necessities such as health insurance, where they are literally putting their life on the line," he said.

In particular, Mexican immigrants often work at low-wage jobs that provide little or no insurance. Nationally, about one-fifth of Mexican immigrants in sectors like construction, agriculture and service industries have insurance, the report states.

In addition, the report notes that Latin American immigrants in general are in better overall health than most non-Latino whites, but their health declines the longer they reside in the U.S. This is most likely due to inadequate access to services as well as lack of funds to pay for prevention and treatment.

"Immigrants have health capital," Wallace said. "There needs to be a concern with adequate levels of health care services so they can maintain the level of health," they had when they entered the country.

"The report is an instrument for those who want to make informed decisions," said Castaneda. "It provides facts behind the myths for those who really want to construct a better world, who should be more informed."

The release of the report coincides with the Binational Health Week and the Binational Policy Forum on Migration and Health held in Los Angeles.

The forum drew participants from across the U.S., three provinces in Canada, and dignitaries from Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Colombia, with the running theme, "Health has no borders."

More Statistics from: "Migration, Health and Work: Facts behind the Myths."

- \* One in four workers in California are Latino immigrants.
- \* One in five employed men in California (ages 18-64) are Mexican immigrants.
- \* Eight in 10 agricultural workers in California are Mexican immigrants.
- \* 94 percent of Mexican immigrant men in the U.S. are actively employed.
- \* One in four Mexican immigrant adults live in families that are below the federal poverty level.

\* "Mexican immigrants report fewer chronic conditions overall, spend fewer days in bed because of illness and have lower mortality rates than U.S.-born non-Latino whites."

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