



# Immigration Policy Priority Brief

## Immigration Access to Healthcare

### What is Immigrant Access to Healthcare?

Immigrant access to healthcare refers to the availability and accessibility of medical services for immigrant populations, regardless of their immigration status. This includes access to preventative care, emergency medical treatment, maternal health services, mental health support, and ongoing care for chronic conditions. Ensuring immigrant access to healthcare means that all people, regardless of documentation, can receive the medical attention they need without fear of financial ruin or legal repercussions. It also involves addressing the specific healthcare challenges that immigrant communities often face, such as language barriers, lack of insurance coverage, and limited understanding of how to navigate the healthcare system. Without equitable access to healthcare, immigrant families are more vulnerable to poor health outcomes, which can have long-term consequences for their well-being and economic stability.

#### Immigrant Access to Healthcare in the South

In the Southern United States, access to healthcare for immigrants is marked by [significant disparities](#), with many immigrants facing numerous barriers due to restrictive state policies, lack of insurance coverage, and limited healthcare infrastructure designed to support them. A key issue is the failure of many Southern states to expand Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, which leaves many low-income individuals, including immigrants, without access to affordable healthcare. For [undocumented immigrants](#), the situation is even more dire, as they are largely excluded from Medicaid and most state insurance programs, forcing them to rely on out-of-pocket payments or charity care for essential services.

Although emergency care is available regardless of immigration status, access to preventative and ongoing healthcare is often out of reach for many immigrant families due to cost and availability. Immigrant women and children are [particularly affected](#), as prenatal and pediatric care are limited for undocumented individuals in many states. While a few states provide some programs for maternal and pediatric care, these are exceptions rather than the norm. Nonprofits and advocacy groups in the South have stepped in to offer direct healthcare services and push for policy changes, but these initiatives are often underfunded and overwhelmed by the demand within immigrant communities.

## How Immigrant Access to Healthcare Can Advance Equity in the South

Ensuring access to healthcare for immigrants is crucial for advancing racial and class equity in the South, where immigrant communities often face economic vulnerability and racial marginalization. Expanding healthcare access helps reduce health disparities, particularly among Black, Latino, and Asian immigrant populations, who experience higher rates of chronic illness and [lower life expectancy](#) than non-immigrant groups. By addressing health needs early through preventative care, immigrants can avoid catastrophic health costs, contributing to their economic stability and reducing income inequality. Access to healthcare also strengthens public health, as it helps prevent the spread of infectious diseases and promotes the well-being of entire communities. Ultimately, when immigrants can access healthcare without fear, they are better able to integrate into their communities, fostering social cohesion and resilience, which contributes to long-term racial and class equity.

### Legislative Efforts Related to Immigrant Access to Healthcare

1. **Florida:** [Senate Bill 1598](#) (failed): This legislation, “The Welcoming Florida Act” sought to repeal provisions related to hospitals collecting immigrant status data and also deleting a requirement that employers terminate people if they learn that the person is or has become an “undocumented alien”. The bill also sought to add immigration status as a protected class under the Florida Civil Rights Act.
2. **Virginia:** [House Bill 970](#) (failed): This bill would have expanded state-funded healthcare coverage to children under 19 years of age, regardless of their immigration status. The bill also requires the state to work toward distributing information about this program to individuals with limited English proficiency.