



IMMIGRATION POLICY CENTER

...providing factual information about immigration and immigrants in America

For Immediate Release

Senate Health Care Reform Bill and Immigrants Heavy on Rhetoric, Short on Policy

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Washington D.C. - While attempting to reform the nation's health care system, both Congress and the White House are facing considerable pressure to include immigration-related restrictions that are long on rhetoric and short on results. Faced with pressure from the right and immigration restrictionists, the new Senate mark includes over-the-top measures to exclude illegal immigrants and restrict the participation of legal immigrants. These poor policies do not protect public health and will undoubtedly result in the exclusion of U.S. citizens. Furthermore, inclusion of these provisions has failed to win support of the very critics they were trying to appease.

Excluding legal immigrants is bad public policy.

The Senate mark includes harsh eligibility restrictions on LEGAL immigrants. Each year the U.S. generously admits immigrants into the U.S. to live, work, reunite with their families, and pursue the American dream. Many immigrants eventually become U.S. citizens, and just like U.S. citizens, legal immigrants work and pay taxes. Legal immigrants are part of our communities, schools, workplaces, places of worship and many serve our country in the armed forces. It does not make sense to exclude them from paying into the health care system for any amount of time.

The proposed verification procedures are costly and ineffective.

The Senate bill includes measures that would require the legal status of all persons applying for benefits to be verified. While this may seem simple and appropriate, we know through experience that overly burdensome citizenship verification requirements in the Medicaid and Medicare contexts have resulted in obstacles for U.S. citizens attempting to secure benefits and have [failed](#) to identify unauthorized immigrants - all at great expense to American taxpayers. Many U.S. citizens--particularly the elderly and minorities--do not possess the necessary documents to prove their citizenship, and obtaining the documents may take a great deal of time and be costly. Furthermore, government databases used to verify status are error prone. As a result, health care for U.S. citizens and eligible legal immigrants will likely be delayed or denied.

Excluding illegal immigrants from purchasing health insurance is short-sighted.

The chairman's mark excludes unauthorized immigrants from using their own money to purchase health insurance through the Exchange. It is common sense that the more people who pay into the health care system, the more the costs are spread out over the entire population. Access to health care, particularly preventive care services, not only improves public health, but is also a cost savings to the system. The Center for Science in the Public Interest [concluded](#) that comprehensive prevention programs are the most economical way to maximize health and minimize health care costs. Immigrants are eager to pay their fair share and contribute to paying for health reform. In return, immigrants should have affordable health insurance like everyone else in America. It's common sense to include immigrants' contributions.

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Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Immigration has become the perennial wall into which Congress drives during each and every legislative debate. We urgently need a comprehensive and workable solution to resolve our immigration problems. Until then, immigration will continue to be used to thwart the progress and promise of America's future.

For more information on immigrants and health care see the following IPC Fact Checks:

- [**Including Legal Immigrants in Health Care Reform: Just What the Doctor Ordered**](#) (IPC Fact Check, August, 2009)
- [**Sharing the Costs, Sharing the Benefits: Inclusion is the Best Medicine**](#) (IPC Fact Check, July, 2009)

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