



Healthy Mind, Healthy Future

Promoting the Mental Health and Wellbeing of
Children in Immigrant Families in California

Executive Summary



THE CURRENT Federal Administration's aggressive immigration enforcement policies and inflammatory rhetoric toward immigrant communities have negatively impacted the mental health and wellbeing of children in immigrant families. As California continues to serve as a beacon of hope for our nation and immigrant communities, The Children's Partnership and the California Immigrant Policy Center launched Healthy Mind, Healthy Future, a research and policy project focused on better understanding the

impact of immigration enforcement on the health and wellbeing of children in immigrant families. In doing so, The Children's Partnership and the California Immigrant Policy Center sought to identify what California can do today to further support children in immigrant families through the development of a policy agenda to ensure all children, regardless of immigration status, remain healthy, feel secure, and continue to thrive.

This report documents the Healthy Mind, Healthy Future research project, including results from focus groups and

surveys among immigrant families, surveys among health care providers, and key informant interviews among a variety of stakeholders throughout California. The report also identifies promising programs and practices in California that demonstrate how many communities in California are taking matters into their own hands to help mitigate the increased fear and anxiety among immigrant families and provide a supportive environment for them and their children.



Research Findings

The current hostile environment contributes to heightened stress, fear, anxiety, and depression that, combined with a pre-existing reluctance to access health care services and participate in programs and activities that promote wellbeing, often results in distractions in school and struggles at home. These events can derail an otherwise loved, vibrant, healthy, and capable child's path to success. However, despite the current stress and fear that immigrant families face, our research uncovered the resilience of these families, as well as many promising practices that local community leaders have implemented to help families feel supported. Research findings focus on the following:

- ▶ Current political climate of the United States
- ▶ What immigrant parents want for their children
- ▶ Immigration status: a barrier to parents' dreams and goals
- ▶ An anti-immigrant climate impedes success at school
- ▶ How immigrant parents and children are feeling
- ▶ Utilization of health services and public programs by immigrant families
- ▶ Enrollment in social services by immigrant families
- ▶ Safe spaces and trusted resources for immigrant families
- ▶ How immigrant parents and children want to be seen by society

California can continue to build on the progress made at the state level in the last two decades by advancing an inclusive and progressive agenda reflecting the diverse communities that make up the state. Based on our research findings and subsequent conversations with key partners and stakeholders, the policy and programmatic recommendations included in this report offer a path forward to support the healthy development of children in immigrant families and create a more inclusive environment where all families can thrive.

Policy and Programmatic Recommendations for a Brighter Future for Children in Immigrant Families

Policy and practice recommendations that were generated as a result of research activities include:

1. STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY SAFETY TO ENSURE THAT CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES FEEL SECURE AND SUPPORTED IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

- ▶ Federal policymakers should pass legislation supporting codification and expansion of the current national sensitive locations policy, particularly at or near places that are critical to children's health and wellbeing. Schools are considered safe spaces in ICE memos, but a law would codify limits on immigration enforcement actions at or near sensitive locations, such as a private playground of a child care center or school.
- ▶ State agencies should carefully follow federal law and guidance to ensure information will not be shared with federal immigration officials.
- ▶ State agency staff and administration officials should support the full implementation of California laws, including SB 54 and AB 699, that protect immigrants and their families in their communities. Activities may include: a thorough assessment to identify what steps individual health clinics or the state is taking to support community needs and the gaps that still exist.
- ▶ State associations representing educators, health and social service providers, and businesses should support implementation of the California Values Act (SB 54) through member education, public awareness, and adoption of safe spaces policies in health care and social service settings.
- ▶ California schools should implement AB 699 and provide safe spaces for parents and family members to express concern and learn about immigration policy, including programs that educate families about their rights.
- ▶ The California Department of Education should encourage Local Educational Agencies to address School Climate (Priority 6) in their Local Control and Accountability Plan, directly linking opportunities to create welcoming environments, particularly for students in immigrant families, with state requirements.

2. INVEST IN COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES AND A COMMUNITY-BASED WORKFORCE TO SUPPORT IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

- ▶ Local government and philanthropic organizations should support legal services and advocacy organizations in training existing health navigators, enrollers, and community health workers, and by expanding the workforce to educate immigrant families about their rights and advocate for policy changes.
- ▶ State and local government should distribute information and resources, train staff, and expand community engagement and partnership programs for local residents in innovative ways and support model practices.
- ▶ California state agencies and philanthropic organizations should provide incentives for schools to become forums for educating families about their rights and to create programs to support them, expanding upon and developing other school-based campaigns that provide information to immigrant families across the state.
- ▶ Philanthropic organizations should invest in the identification, strengthening, and replication of leadership networks that empower residents to educate their communities.
- ▶ Researchers should partner with community members to identify, evaluate, and expand upon community-based therapy models that work, including alternative or non-traditional methods of care.

3. IMPROVE ACCESS, COORDINATION, AND INTEGRATION OF SERVICES TO REDUCE BARRIERS FOR IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

- ▶ Federal policymakers should stop efforts to discourage immigrant families and children from accessing nutrition, health and other programs and services.
- ▶ State policymakers should grant all low-income adults, regardless of immigration status, access to health care services that would allow them to live healthier lives and prevent the onset of illness to better care for their children.
- ▶ Local policymakers should adopt or expand upon county programs to provide health care services to their residents and build momentum for statewide coverage solutions.
- ▶ State and local policymakers should provide more stable and flexible funding sources that create incentives for integration and collaboration between health clinics, community-based organizations, schools, legal services, and more.
- ▶ State and local policymakers should provide stable and flexible funding sources to create incentives that identify and chip away at the social determinants of health.
- ▶ State agencies should develop a system across the state that identifies mental health care that is culturally competent and contextually aware of their unique needs to support referrals
- ▶ Community organizations should offer safe spaces for their community members to share mental health impacts.
- ▶ Philanthropic organizations should support researchers to evaluate existing and new integrated service delivery models in order to refine and expand what works.
- ▶ Philanthropic organizations should also support and evaluate options that build on the skills and social capital of volunteers to provide support to immigrant families needing multiple services.



4. BUILD CAPACITY OF PROVIDERS, EDUCATORS AND OTHERS WHO INTERACT WITH IMMIGRANT FAMILIES

- ▶ Department of Homeland Security should strengthen and train staff on protocols to minimize harm to children if they are present during immigration enforcement actions. They should also ensure that detained or deported parents are able to make decisions about their child's care.
- ▶ State agencies should include trauma-informed care training as part of Continuing Medical Education, medical school curriculum, teacher and school administrator training, and licenses for social workers and other mental health professionals.
- ▶ California should adopt a statewide trauma-informed care strategy for child-serving programs and initiatives that is adapted to include the unique needs of immigrant families.
- ▶ Health plans, hospitals, and clinics should conduct education and outreach policy in newsletters and trainings to their frontline staff, providers, and executives regarding the impacts of immigration enforcement.
- ▶ Philanthropic organizations should support dissemination of *Know Your Rights* training to a wide array of sectors working with immigrant families.

5. EDUCATE AND ENGAGE COMMUNITIES ABOUT IMMIGRANT RIGHTS AND BUILD PUBLIC WILL TO TAKE ACTION

- ▶ Advocacy groups and philanthropic organizations should continue to share accurate information related to the immigrant community and recognize immigrant contributions.
- ▶ Policymakers and agency leaders, at the state and local level, should more frequently highlight the value of immigrants and immigrants' rights publicly with mainstream and ethnic media. They should also use their platform to partner with community-based organizations to spread clear messages that educate immigrant families on immigration policy and their rights.
- ▶ Philanthropic and advocacy groups should create partnerships with ethnic and mainstream media to provide *Know Your Rights* information, programs where people can ask questions, and other helpful educational programs, rather than perpetuating terrifying stories about immigrants.
- ▶ Advocacy groups should mobilize and organize as a way to build on families' resiliency.
- ▶ State voter engagement efforts should strategize at the neighborhood level and take on the role of advocating on behalf of their local communities, including immigrant families.
- ▶ Philanthropic organizations, advocacy groups, and researchers should raise awareness among the public and policymakers about the importance of children of immigrants to California's future.

We join efforts to ensure we work together to do more to protect and defend the wellbeing of children in immigrant families. California has served as a leader in advocating for policies of inclusion for immigrant families, but as growing rifts between local and state policies emerge, the welcoming climate so many in California have worked hard to create is being chipped away. By prioritizing the wellbeing of children in immigrant families, we help push California to invest in the structures that protect and raise all children—strong families, nurturing institutions, and supportive communities. In doing so, we advance solutions in the best interests of our children and all of us.

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