

Healthy Mind, Healthy Future:

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

In order to better understand the impact of heightened immigration enforcement activities and anti-immigrant policies and rhetoric on the mental health and wellbeing of children in immigrant families in California, The Children’s Partnership and the California Immigrant Policy Center joined efforts to launch a research and policy project called *Healthy Mind, Healthy Future*. Through this work over 2017-2018, we identified policies and programs to better support children in immigrant families and 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.

California’s Children in Immigrant Families

The diversity of our nation’s and state’s children is very much driven by the children of immigrants. Half of children in California—4.5 million—are from immigrant families; more than one and a half million have an undocumented parent; and 285,000 are undocumented themselves. Although immigrants are equally likely to be employed as U.S. citizens, children in immigrant families are more likely to live in poverty. In California, nearly 60% of children who live below the federal poverty threshold live in households with an immigrant parent.

Methods

- ▶ **Summer 2017:** A 27-item survey was distributed to health providers across California to learn from their observations regarding changes in families’ overall health and access to services since the 2016 presidential election.
- ▶ **Fall 2017:** Focus groups were conducted in Fresno and Riverside among Latino and Asian immigrant parents and youth to learn about their experiences.
- ▶ **Spring 2018:** A 32-item survey was distributed to immigrant parents across California to learn about their goals and challenges, recent changes in behaviors and emotions, community safety, views on immigration policy, and more.
- ▶ **Spring 2018:** 23 key informant interviews were conducted among various stakeholders across California.

Health Care Provider Research Findings

- ▶ 90% of providers reported seeing an increase in anxiety and fear among children, while 70% observed an increase in symptoms of depression.
- ▶ 42% reported children in immigrant families were increasingly skipping scheduled health care appointments.
- ▶ 70% of the providers surveyed observed families having increased anxiety in doing everyday activities, like taking their kids to school or the park, for fear of immigration enforcement.
- ▶ Two-thirds of providers observed an increase in families’ concerns about enrolling in Medi-Cal, WIC, CalFresh, or other public programs.

Immigrant Family Research Findings

- ▶ Since the 2016 election, the majority of immigrant parents say they have felt uncertainty about the future, stress, fear, frustration, and anxiety more than they did before the election. At least a third think their children are feeling less hopeful and happy since the election.
- ▶ A plurality of parents says their immigration status and President Trump are the biggest barriers keeping them from meeting their personal goals. Parents also believe family deportation or separation, President Trump, and their immigration status are the biggest obstacles to their children achieving their goals.
- ▶ The majority says their children are worried about their safety, are stressed about the wellbeing of their family, and exhibit increased fear and anxiety.
- ▶ The majority believes their children are worried about their family or someone they know being separated due to detention or deportation.
- ▶ Immigrant parents feel safest in their homes. Their church or place of worship also rises to the top as locations where they feel safe from immigration enforcement. However,

nearly one-in-five report that they feel unsafe no matter where they are in the community.

- ▶ Immigrant parents want every other American, particularly those who stand against them, to realize that they are human and deserve respect. Children in immigrant families want people to know that they and their families have feelings and want to be treated with respect as well.

Recommendations

1. Strengthen community safety to ensure that children, youth, and families feel secure and supported in their communities.

- ▶ Support codification and expansion of the current national sensitive locations policy, particularly at or near places that are critical to children's health and wellbeing.
- ▶ Ensure information collected by state agencies is not shared with federal immigration officials.
- ▶ Fully implement California laws, like SB 54 and AB 699.

2. Invest in community-based approaches and a community-based workforce to support immigrant families.

- ▶ Train existing health navigators, enrollers, and community health workers, and expand the workforce to educate immigrant families about their rights and advocate for policy changes.
- ▶ Expand community engagement and partnership programs to reach and empower local residents in innovative ways and support model practices.
- ▶ Invest in the identification, strengthening, and replication of leadership networks that empower residents to educate their communities.

3. Improve access, coordination, and integration of services.

- ▶ Stop efforts to discourage immigrant families and children from accessing nutrition, health, and other programs and services.
- ▶ Grant all low-income adults, regardless of immigration status, access to health care services and coverage.

- ▶ Provide better tools and interventions to help make referrals to social, mental health, or legal services.
- ▶ Develop a system across the state that identifies mental health care that is culturally competent and contextually aware of immigrant families' unique needs in order to support referrals.

4. Build capacity of providers, educators, and others who interact with immigrant families.

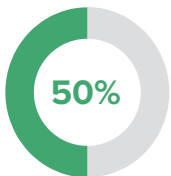
- ▶ Strengthen and train staff on protocols to minimize harm to children if they are present during immigration enforcement actions.
- ▶ Include trauma-informed care training as part of continuing medical education, medical school curriculum, teacher and school administrator training, and licenses for social workers and other mental health professionals.
- ▶ Adopt a statewide, trauma-informed care strategy that is adapted to include the unique needs of immigrant families.

5. Educate and engage communities about immigrant rights and build public will to take action.

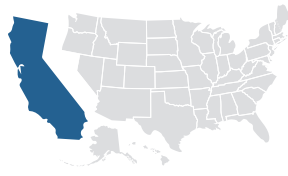
- ▶ Share accurate, up-to-date information related to the immigrant community and recognize immigrant contributions.
- ▶ Highlight the value of immigrants and immigrants' rights in media.
- ▶ Include *Know Your Rights* programming on mainstream and ethnic media.
- ▶ Strengthen individual civic engagement at the neighborhood level.

Additional Information

- ▶ **Healthy Mind, Healthy Future report:** bit.ly/HMHFreport
- ▶ **Provider survey infographic:** bit.ly/ProviderInfographic
- ▶ **Healthy Mind, Healthy Future site:** bit.ly/HMHFpage



Half of all California children (about 4.5 million) live in immigrant families.



California is home to over **200,000 DACA-enrolled individuals** of the estimated 800,000 living in the U.S.



About **1 in 6 children** in California have at least one parent who is undocumented.