

# IMMIGRATION POLICY IS HEALTH POLICY: EXECUTIVE ORDER 13768 & THE IMPACT OF ANTI-IMMIGRANT POLICY ON HEALTH

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## INTRODUCTION

Over the past couple years, anti-immigrant sentiment has been building nationally. In January 2017, President Trump issued Executive Order 13768: Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States (EO 13768), which fanned the flames of that anti-immigrant narrative, raising it into the country's national consciousness. Since then, several additional policy decisions, such as ending the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) programs, and issuing Executive Order 13769, also known as the "travel ban," have strengthened this narrative.

Because of EO 13768's enforcement priorities, arrests, detentions, and deportations are increasing in Colorado.<sup>1,2</sup> This creates apprehension and both short- and long-term health and safety impacts for immigrants without documentation. As the Trump administration continues to intensify its efforts to curb immigration, Colorado legislators, public health agencies, and health care and advocacy organizations should consider immigration policy as health policy, and show leadership on these issues.

# EFFECTS ON IMMIGRANTS' HEALTH

## FEAR & STRESS

The current anti-immigrant political climate has great impacts on the health and well-being of the immigrant population because of the fear and stress it instills in immigrants.



The Trump administration has significantly increased deportation efforts through EO 13768. Since its signing, Colorado and Wyoming deportations increased by 145% in 2017 while arrests were up by 20%.<sup>3,4</sup> The increases are causing alarm among immigrants without documentation, which leads to long-term health issues. The constant stress leads to deterioration of the mind and body, causing complex and costly health conditions such as depression, heart disease, diabetes, and obesity, among others.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, it can trigger and manifest illness or worsen existing conditions. As Trump's "deportation force" remains active, immigrants without documentation are feeling unstable.<sup>6</sup>

Additionally, all immigrants must endure increased overt discrimination.<sup>7</sup> There has been a marked increase in anti-immigrant rhetoric, including using "illegal" to describe people, narratives framing immigrants as criminals, and calls for violence against them.

Immigrant children and adolescents are especially vulnerable because they must contend with the social implications of the current political environment. In a survey conducted by the Southern Poverty Law Center, **90% of educators reported a negative effect on school climate across the nation post-election** with increases in bullying, derogatory remarks, and inappropriate behavior toward immigrant classmates.<sup>6</sup> Immigrant children, regardless of documentation status, must live with these stressors in all aspects of their life.

## FAMILY SEPARATION

Increased immigration law enforcement from EO 13768 means over 5 percent of Coloradans, and 9 percent of Colorado children, are at-risk of losing one or more of their family members to detention and deportation.

These "mixed status" families make up a substantial percentage of Colorado's population: 276,589 people, 110,634 of which are US citizen children, live with an undocumented family member.<sup>8</sup>

Family separation is linked to severe psychological effects on children. Children who have been separated from

### PYRAMID OF VULNERABILITY

- Immigrants directly targeted by policies
- Immigrants with temporary legal residency
- US-born family members of vulnerable immigrants
- Permanent legal resident immigrants
- Friends and neighbors of immigrants

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11. K. Rodriguez, personal communication, January 23, 2018.
12. Toxic Stress. (2017). Retrieved February 22, 2018, from <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress>

their parents or are aware of the possibility of parents being detained and deported suffer from anxiety, depression, aggression, withdrawal, and negative academic performance.<sup>9,10</sup> This trend is also noticed in children whose families remain intact, suggesting that immigration enforcement affects children regardless if family separation occurs or not. Dr. Kristine Rodrigues, a pediatrician in a Denver emergency department, shared anecdotally that **post-EO 13768, she treats more children and families who express worry about a parent being deported, and that she has treated young children with panic attacks from witnessing a parent's arrest by ICE.**<sup>11</sup>

Toxic stress occurs when a person experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity.<sup>12</sup> In the short-term, toxic stress can suppress the immune system, making people more susceptible to illness, and high levels of stress hormones influence learning and memory.<sup>13</sup> In the long-term, toxic stress increases chronic diseases such as obesity, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, PTSD, etc.<sup>14</sup> EO 13768 and the other anti-immigrant policy changes that followed can be a cause of toxic stress in citizens and non-citizens that will have lifelong impacts.

### ANDAZOLA MORALES

Andazola is a Colorado father of four US citizen children, who was deported in December 2017 after having lived in the US for decades. He was under the impression that he would be getting a green card.<sup>15</sup> His oldest daughter, a senior at Yale, took time away from her studies to campaign for her father to remain in Colorado. Her efforts were unsuccessful. Now, she is arranging to relocate the family to Mexico and may have to quit school to provide for her younger siblings.<sup>16</sup>



Separation can also put an incredible financial burden on the torn-apart family, because if one spouse remains, they must then be the sole provider. The result of going from a two-income household to a single-income household can be catastrophic, especially since immigrants without documentation already face economic hardship and struggle with providing basic necessities for their family.<sup>17</sup> The outcome is even worse in situations where the sole breadwinner is detained and deported and families do not have a source of income, or when the choice must be made to either bring their citizen children with them or leave them behind with other caregivers.

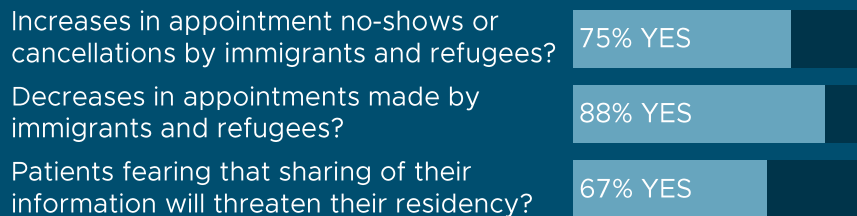
## EFFECTS ON PUBLIC HEALTH

### HEALTH CARE USAGE

EO 13768 and the other immigration policies that followed it have discouraged immigrants from seeking health care when they need it because they do not want their documentation status exposed. Clinics across the country have noticed a significant decline in clinic visits. This trend was confirmed in a survey of Mile High Health Alliance members that provide direct care, most of which belong to the Denver safety net system, of immigrant health care utilization.<sup>18</sup>

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## HAS YOUR CLINIC SEEN:



*Survey of member health care providers, Mile High Health Alliance<sup>18</sup>*

Avoiding care risks immigrants' health, the population's health, and the system's health. Dr. Rodrigues notes that, compared to last year, **more immigrant children are coming to the ER with emergent conditions that could have been less serious had they visited a primary care doctor regularly.**<sup>11</sup>

Immigrants without documentation are already at a disadvantage since they do not qualify for health coverage benefits and rely instead on emergency Medicaid, charity care, or self-pay.<sup>19</sup> Dr. Margaret Huffman, Director of the Community Health Services Division at Jefferson County Public Health, confirms that **since many adults without documentation do not have insurance, EO 13768 and other anti-immigrant policies could result in higher usage of costly emergency department services**, as opposed to more cost-effective preventative or routine services.<sup>20</sup>

## ENROLLMENT

States that offer health coverage for immigrants without documentation are seeing decreases in enrollment.<sup>21</sup> Parents without documentation who have US citizen children eligible for programs, such as Medicaid or Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), refuse to enroll their children because of the perceived possibility of discovery. While Colorado doesn't offer coverage for immigrants without documentation, it is experiencing this trend in other public programs for which they are eligible. Tri-County Health Department and Jefferson County Public Health have both seen an **increase in immigrants refusing to enroll in or withdrawing from benefits, due to fear that ICE can find and detain them if their name is in the system.**<sup>20,22</sup> Fear of consequences is reducing access to benefits that help families get care and stay healthy.

## PUBLIC SAFETY

Anti-immigrant policies are damaging the trust local law enforcement needs to have with immigrant populations to ensure safe communities. Aurora Police Chief Nick Metz says **people are refusing to call 911 in emergencies due to the fear of immigration issues.**<sup>23</sup> Historically, fear of deportation has dissuaded immigrants from reporting violence and crime, but it's getting worse.<sup>24</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Federal immigration policy is having a variety of negative impacts on health, both for immigrants and the broader Colorado community. We must act to counter its effects and ensure the health, well-being, and safety of our people.

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