

The Trump Administration is proposing a rule that would hurt millions of children. The “public charge” proposal could put an individual’s legal immigration status at risk if they use critical programs that support health, nutrition, and economic stability. If enacted, the proposed rule would make immigrant families afraid to seek programs that help them stay productive and raise thriving children. That puts the health and wellbeing of millions of children at risk.

Part of federal immigration law for over a hundred years, the “public charge” test is designed to identify people who may depend on the government as their main source of support. If the government believes someone is likely to become a “public charge,” it may choose to deny them admission to the U.S. or lawful permanent residence (“green card” status). Historically, the federal government has considered a very short list of benefits when determining who is likely to become a “public charge.” The administration’s proposal would expand this list, adding non-emergency Medicaid (with limited exceptions for certain disability services related to education), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and housing assistance.

THE HEALTH AND WELLBEING OF CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS IS VITAL TO OUR COUNTRY’S FUTURE

Children with immigrant parents are a large, growing segment of the U.S. child population.

One in four U.S. children has at least one parent born outside the U.S. The vast majority (88 percent) of these children are U.S.-born citizens.¹ A smaller share (approximately 12 percent) of children are immigrants themselves.²

Children benefit when they—and their family members—can access programs and services that meet basic needs and promote healthy development.

Children need healthy foods; safe, stable housing, and adequate health care throughout childhood to grow up healthy and succeed as adults. The wellbeing of children now is essential to their own development and our country’s future success.

Experiencing stress and instability—such as economic insecurity and not having enough to eat—harms children’s development.

Substantial, persistent adversity—sometimes called toxic stress—in early childhood can interfere with brain development. That affects how children learn and their ability to manage emotions.³ It can also lead to physical and mental health problems that last into adulthood.⁴ Not having enough food, inadequate or unstable housing, and economic insecurity are all examples of adverse experiences that can lead to toxic stress.

“Moms are afraid to sign back up for Medicaid, food stamps, and other services.”

*Quote by a North Carolina home visitor from CLASP’s report **Our Children’s Fear: Immigration Policy’s Effects on Young Children***

Children in immigrant families benefit when they have access to programs and services that help meet their basic needs and promote their development.

Children are inherently dependent upon their parents for emotional, physical, and material support. Penalizing immigrant parents for using publicly funded health, nutrition, and housing programs—for which they are legally eligible—may also result in children losing these services. What's more, parents' own health and wellbeing affects their ability to meet children's needs. The administration's proposed rule would have devastating consequences, with adverse effects for generations to come.

Children thrive when PARENTS THRIVE

Parents' and children's health and wellbeing are inextricably linked. In the earliest years of life, children's interactions and relationships with their primary caregivers lay the foundation for healthy development.⁵ Responsive caregiving lets children know they are safe and protected. That helps them regulate stress, encourages them to explore their environments, and supports early learning.⁶

When parents are healthy, well, and cared for, they're better able to provide financially for their families and support their children's development.⁷ Conversely, parents' stress and health challenges—which can be caused by unstable housing, not having enough to eat, or financial insecurity—impede effective caregiving and can undermine children's development.⁸

Children thrive when they have NUTRITIOUS FOOD

Children in immigrant families who participate in SNAP have more resources to afford medical care and prescription medications.⁹

Children thrive when they have HEALTH CARE

Children in immigrant families who have health insurance are more likely to have a primary medical provider and receive regular health care visits. They're also less likely to have unmet care needs.¹⁰

Children thrive when they have STABLE HOUSING

Without housing assistance, children are more likely to live in overcrowded conditions, become homeless, and move frequently.¹¹ They're also more likely to remain in high-poverty neighborhoods, which is associated with poor health and educational outcomes.¹²

Because of the Trump Administration's attacks, immigrant families are already choosing to forgo basic needs like food and health care out of fear. The "public charge" proposal would make it even worse.

Despite remaining eligible for health, food, and other basic needs programs, children's participation is likely to drop as a consequence of the proposed rule. CLASP has documented the impact current immigration policies are already having on young children in immigrant families. This includes less access to nutrition and health care services as well as increased housing and income instability.¹³

History shows that legislative and regulatory changes to immigration rules can have far-reaching collateral impacts. Based on benefit enrollment patterns after the 1996 welfare reform, researchers expect immigrants' use of benefits to decline significantly if the public charge rule is implemented. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, as many as 2 million U.S. citizen children with immigrant parents could disenroll from Medicaid and CHIP, despite remaining eligible, out of fear of immigration-related consequences.¹⁴

We can all speak out against this harmful proposal.

Health, nutrition, and other basic needs programs keep children learning, parents working, and families strong—allowing all of us to contribute to our communities. That's why we need to fight back against efforts to undermine immigrants' access to these services. The public has 60 days—ending December 10, 2018—to submit comments on the proposed "public charge" rule. Now is the time to make your voice heard. Tell the government how this rule would harm children, families, and your community.

Take action at ProtectingImmigrantFamilies.org. For more information, contact [Madison Hardee](mailto:mhardee@clasp.org) (mhardee@clasp.org).

Citations

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