



INADEQUATE PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES FOR IMMIGRANTS MAY DIMINISH THEIR HEALTH AND LEAD TO DISABILITY

Immigrants disproportionately receive fewer preventive health care services.

A briefing was held on “Affordable Health for All” that addressed healthcare for immigrants. Persons who presented at the forum were public policy experts on immigrant issues and health care.

Summary

There are 37 million foreign-born immigrants in the U.S. who make up 13% of the nation’s population. The information presented at the forum made it clear that for immigrants, public health services—when it comes to both primary and secondary health care—is less than adequate. Non-citizen immigrants, when compared to the normal population, have disproportionately fewer opportunities to access health care and accounted for 22% of the nonelderly uninsured in 2006. Non-citizen immigrants are more than 3 times more likely to be uninsured, spend half as much on health care, are twice as likely to have incomes below 200% of the poverty line, are half as likely to use emergency services and are less likely to receive preventive care than non-immigrants.

Disability Prevention Issues

The evidence presented at the forum was clear—immigrants are inadequately covered by the U.S. public health system. The purpose of public health is to provide services for all who live in America in an effort to create a healthy population. There is evidence that 89% of whites receive preventive care, while only 67% of Latinos do. A focus area of public health is to prevent diminished health that leads to disability, and this includes access to health care and reduction of health disparities for all who live in America.

These adverse public health conditions for immigrants affect the total U.S. population and economy. The U.S. is 46th in the world in life expectancy and 42nd in infant mortality. Inadequate public health contributes to these adverse health outcomes. It has been estimated that there are many immigrants with poor health and that there are approximately 8 million immigrants with disabilities. Thus, the healthcare system should focus on healthy communities with opportunities for all individuals, including immigrants, to live healthier lives. In addition, the healthcare system should remove structural barriers that make it difficult for immigrants to take care of their own health.

Intervention

A letter was sent to the keynote speaker to comment on the importance of immigrants receiving access to public health services to prevent diminished health and disability.

Recommendation

All people in America should have adequate access to health care and public health services.