



The Poorest Immigrants Subsidize Healthcare for Everyone Else

ADVERTISEMENT

New America Media, Commentary, EunSook Lee, Posted: Nov 29, 2009 [NT Review it on NewsTrust](#)

Would it be acceptable if we were to make medical care out of reach for any segment of our nation's population? For the 15.5 million Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Pacific Islanders? Or for the 44.3 million Latinos? Let's hope not. But, as it stands, our growing acceptance is paving the road for health reform proposals that categorically exclude our nation's immigrant population. We forget that when people like Lou Dobbs or Rep. Joe Wilson are enraged about "immigrants" they are talking largely about communities of color. Americans know it is wrong to discriminate based on immutable characteristics such as sex or race—but convincing them to protect the act of being an immigrant remains a challenge that cuts across social justice issues such as health reform.

Advertisements on our website do not necessarily reflect the views or mission of New America Media, our affiliates or our funders.

The days are nearing when we may see the passage of major health reform legislation. We know that there are significant differences between the House and Senate bills on how immigrants are treated -- for example, in the House bill, undocumented immigrants are able to purchase health insurance with their own money in the exchange while they will be excluded from doing so in the Senate. There are also common problems with both bills: the continued ban on federal funding for legal immigrants in Medicaid who have had their status for less than five years.

Currently, legal immigrants, who work and pay taxes that contribute to our health care system will continue to be ineligible to receive federally-funded Medicaid services for five years. In this case, we are not talking about those who make at least 133 percent of federal poverty level and could access affordability credits like everyone else for purchasing insurance in the exchange. We are talking about immigrants with the lowest incomes. It is unreasonable and saddening that under the current health reform proposals, the people who really need it will not get it.

This August we saw indignant crowds who largely had health insurance opposing the ability for more Americans to be insured. The indignation should also be coming from immigrant communities. And it is rising now. In the last two weeks, more than 6,000 people from Washington State to Washington, D.C. signed petitions demanding that immigrants be treated fairly by repealing the five year waiting period and enabling undocumented immigrants to purchase insurance.

On Monday, November 23, hundreds of people in California and Washington, D.C. stood up for immigrants in health reform in two distinct actions to highlight the best and the worst that there is in the national debate concerning how we as Americans treat immigrants. The rally and vigil outside of Speaker Pelosi's office, and the confrontation with Rep. Joe Wilson's staff are actions that drew not only longtime health advocates, but also people who realized that this complicated health care issue is intimately about them and could result in the exclusion of their friends, families, and colleagues.

Communities across America are waking up to this realization and Congress needs to take notice. In San Francisco, a group of Chinese American tenants gathered over 1,000 signatures in just two days, for example. A strong and diverse coalition of local and national community organizations from health advocates to immigrant rights organizations to Asian American and Pacific Islander community groups came together, because the call for equity in health reform needs to be louder.

EunSook Lee is the Executive Director of the National Korean American Service & Education Consortium (NAKASEC). Read more at <http://nakasec.org/blog>.

Related Articles:

[Health Care Reform's Missing Piece: Elder Care](#)

[Five Years is a Lifetime to Wait for Affordable Health Care](#)

[Hispanic Caucus Troubled by Health Provision on Undocumented Immigrants](#)

Page 1 of 1

[Return to Normal Version](#)
[Send Page to Friend](#)
[Subscribe to NAM Newsletters](#)

