

Creating equitable health care coverage regardless of immigration status

Support HB 1191

No one should be denied health care coverage because of their immigration status. Yet in Washington state many immigrants have no way to obtain affordable health care coverage. This means they go without critical health services and have limited access to care.

House Bill 1191 would help all Washington residents have equitable access to health care coverage. It would create parity in health care by creating state-funded programs to cover immigrants who, due to their immigration status, are ineligible for federal Medicaid and Qualified Health Plans through the Health Benefit Exchange. Meeting the basic health care needs for all Washingtonians is a cost-effective policy that makes every community healthier and is crucial during the pandemic, which has exacerbated underlying inequities.

Undocumented Immigrants are Disproportionately Uninsured

There are about 240,000 undocumented immigrants in Washington state, and many of them do not have access to health insurance. Currently there is no affordable health coverage program available for undocumented immigrants who are over age 19 and not pregnant. An estimated 46% of undocumented individuals are uninsured in Washington, compared to just 7% of the overall population. Disparities in coverage create disparities in care. Compared to the insured population, those who are uninsured are less likely to have a primary care doctor or get timely and routine care and are more likely to be hospitalized for preventable conditions and illnesses. This bill is an essential step towards ending these inequities and keeping all of our communities healthy.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has Exacerbated Health Care Disparities

Creating equitable access to health care coverage is particularly important right now, as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated long-standing health disparities in our state. Research throughout the pandemic has repeatedly shown immigrants and people of color are disproportionately contracting, being hospitalized for, and dying from COVID-19. By the end of 2020, Latinx residents made up 35% of COVID-19 cases in Washington, despite representing only 13% of the state's population, according to data from the Washington Department of Health. COVID-19 infection rates in Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander and Latinx patients are five times higher than they are for their white counterparts, and twice as high in Black patients. Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander patients are dying from COVID at a rate six times greater than that of white patients. These communities also heavily represent the population of essential workers who have been required to risk themselves to keep our economy going. Yet these same communities do not have access to health care coverage to meet their basic health care needs.

Equitable Health Care is Cost Effective and Will Lead to Healthier Communities

Enacting this bill is a cost-effective measure that will improve the overall health outcomes in our state. Providing access to affordable health coverage for all Washingtonians, regardless of their immigration status, will ensure more people have their basic health care needs met. This means fewer costly interventions for serious health needs and fewer people hospitalized for preventable conditions. Currently, undocumented Washingtonians pay an estimated \$1 billion in taxes, yet they do not have access to the publicly funded health care programs their tax dollars help support.

HB 1191 is a critical step towards achieving health equity, reducing health care disparities, and ensuring all communities have access to the health care they need, which improves public health for everyone in Washington.