

CALIFORNIA IMMIGRANT WELFARE COLLABORATIVE
California Update

Volume 6

Issue 5

November 20, 2002

IMMIGRANT ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

**CIWC Conducts Survey on Barriers Faced by Immigrants
Results to Be Released at 2003 Summit on Immigrant Health**

The California Immigrant Welfare Collaborative has been conducting a statewide survey of health care providers and community-based organizations aimed at deepening advocates' and policymakers' understanding of the barriers immigrants face in trying to obtain health care in California.

A comprehensive analysis of survey results will be released next year at the Immigrant Health Summit, to be sponsored by CIWC along with a number of other health care and immigrant rights advocates. Scheduled to be held in southern California in Mar. 2003—Mar. 6 has been tentatively set as the date—the summit will mark the formal launch of a statewide campaign to broaden access to health care programs for all immigrants, regardless of their immigration status. (At the event, CIWC will also announce its immigrants' rights state policy agenda for 2003.) More information about the Immigrant Health Summit will be available soon on CIWC's Web site. An overview of questions asked by the survey and sampling of responses received thus far follow.

The CIWC immigrant access barriers survey, which was initiated at the end of Oct. 2002, asks participants to rate the severity of a series of barriers by how frequently clients report experiencing them. The barriers include, among others, the fear of being reported to the Immigration and Naturalization Service and the fear that using health care services will hurt an immigrant's chances of obtaining lawful permanent residence (i.e., getting a green card) or becoming a U.S. citizen. To date, more than 2,000 surveys have been distributed and more than 200 returned.

One survey respondent, whose legal services program advises immigrants on health care eligibility, told of a case that illustrates how deeply rooted immigrants' fears can be:

"Mr.— was diagnosed with diabetes but his wife would not allow him to apply for Medi-Cal . . . [because] she feared it would affect her citizenship application and their home would be seized due to the treatment and money paid for her husband's

services. I tried in vain to make her see that it would not jeopardize their home or her application by showing her applicable laws and handouts. Her husband went into a coma and had to be hospitalized due to nontreatment of his diabetes. . . . [H]e did recover, but now is on dialysis and permanently disabled."

Survey respondents were also asked about their clients' knowledge of eligibility rules, clients' concerns about how much their health care might cost, and problems arising from the lack of personnel or materials in languages other than English. A number of respondents reported that their clients were willing to go to great lengths to use alternatives to available services, because they were unable to understand what the treatment would involve or cost. One told of a case that had long-term consequences for the client involved:

"A participant in our program fractured her hand. She didn't want the doctor in the ER to put on a cast. Instead, she went back to China and used Chinese medicine to heal her hand because she thought the cast would make her hand crooked. She ended up spending three to four months in China to wait for her hand to heal. . . . [T]his three-to-four-month leave may impose some complications as she goes through the naturalization process."

In addition to the survey of providers and community-based organizations, CIWC recently sponsored a series of focus groups with immigrants in Los Angeles, Fresno, and San Jose concerning barriers to health care access. The participants, who included lawful residents as well as undocumented persons, were asked to discuss a wide range of topics—from what they do when a family member gets sick to their thoughts on the kind of

Continued on page 2

THE CALIFORNIA IMMIGRANT WELFARE COLLABORATIVE IS A JOINT PROJECT OF

Asian Pacific American Legal Center of Southern California • Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles
National Immigration Law Center • Services, Immigrant Rights, and Education Network

COLLABORATIVE SACRAMENTO OFFICE: 926 "J" Street, Suite 701, Sacramento, CA 95814 • 916.448.6762 • fax 916.448.6774

TO RECEIVE "CALIFORNIA UPDATE" AND OTHER COLLABORATIVE MATERIALS, REQUEST "CIWC SIGN-UP" FROM
National Immigration Law Center, 3435 Wilshire Blvd., Suite 2850, Los Angeles, CA 90010 • 213.639.3900 • fax 213.639.3911

Continued from page 1

messages that would persuade immigrants to use the health care services for which they are eligible. The results of the focus groups will be used to develop targeted outreach materials and compiled into a final report to be available in March of 2003.

The CIWC survey on access barriers to health care will be

completed by Dec. 15, 2002, and participants should submit their responses by that date. A copy of the survey form has been included with this issue of CALIFORNIA UPDATE. For more information please contact CIWC Northern California policy analyst Isabel Alegria at 510-663-8282, or e-mail her at alegria@nilc.org.

NATIONAL IMMIGRATION LAW CENTER
3435 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 2850
Los Angeles, CA 90010

Address correction requested