



The Kid Angle

Kid-focused news from First Focus on Children

"Survivor mode" is go-to for immigrant families April 7, 2022

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Advocates for children of immigrants are calling on lawmakers to eliminate restrictions that create — and perpetuate — barriers to support and services.

One-quarter of all children in the United States have an immigrant parent and **more than 6 million citizen children live with a family member who is undocumented**. While school closures, family sickness, job loss and other elements of the COVID-19 pandemic affected all the country's children, panelists at our [Kids & COVID conversation series](#) this week said mixed status families struggled with added burdens on their mental, physical and economic health.

“They constantly live in ‘survivor mode,’ even before COVID,” said **Muleba Sumbwe, wellness resource coordinator for UndocuBlack Network** who is also the child of undocumented immigrants.

Many of the federal government's COVID relief programs excluded mixed status families and often their citizen children. These families, many of whom pay U.S. taxes, disproportionately staffed the frontlines of the pandemic as “essential workers” and disproportionately suffered from its health and financial stresses.

“We are here in this country, we are part of the economy, so to feel that we don't have the support in the pandemic, it was hard,” said **Evelyn Ramos, co-chair of the immigration policy committee at United Parent Leaders Action Network**. “I used some of my savings to pay rent and a few things...I don't ask

for resources for me, but obviously, I have two daughters born here and they deserve to have resources.”

State and county government often filled the gaps, the panelists said, but lack of information, transportation challenges and work schedules often made it difficult for immigrant parents to access these services.

Mental Health

Even before the pandemic, the rise of anti-immigrant rhetoric and hostile policies of the Trump Administration, such as the expanded public charge rule, saddled many children in mixed status families with mental health challenges. The new fears and isolation of the pandemic exacerbated these issues and the unique challenges faced by these communities.

“When things shut down, many families didn’t have the tech or broadband needed to be connected to their healthcare providers, including their mental health providers,” said **Gabriella Barbosa, a daughter of immigrants who is managing policy director of The Children’s Partnership**. These families also struggle with a lack of mental health providers who reflect the cultures, languages and diversity of the country’s immigrant families, she added.

Vaccinations

Mixed status families also faced myriad barriers to getting vaccinated, panelists said, including lack of access to health care, lack of transportation, and translation issues as well as elemental distrust of the vaccine system among some communities of color. To overcome these barriers, community-based organizations hosted information sessions, used social media and other “interactive advocacy” techniques, and brought the vaccines to trusted community spaces that families already frequent and can access easily.

United Parent Leaders Action Network organized a children’s vaccination event that used colorful, bilingual fliers and chose a venue that was familiar and comfortable to the community. “And we used the magical words ‘free, no ID necessary, no insurance needed,’” Ramos said.

Removing Barriers

To undo the damage of the pandemic and ensure that children of immigrants receive the medical, financial and other support they need, panelists recommended continued outreach to make families aware of the benefits to

which they are entitled, engaging attorneys, teachers, doctors and other trusted community members in spreading information, and eliminating all restrictions that prevent immigrant families from accessing economic, health care, nutrition and other benefits through legislation such as the **Lift the Bar Act**, which would eliminate the 5-year waiting period currently required before legally present immigrants can access Medicaid, the Children's Health Insurance Program, nutrition programs and other services. For more information, see our [Fact Sheet on the Lift the Bar Act](#).

To view the full conversation, [visit this link](#).

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