

California: Immigrants eligible for Medicaid may not receive coverage

Clodomiro Puentes
2 August 2014

Lawmakers and advocates in California have warned that “potentially thousands” of undocumented youths otherwise eligible for health care under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy may not be receiving coverage owing to “lack of communication” between agencies, among other factors.

The expansion of Medicaid in California (Medi-Cal) under Obama’s Affordable Care Act (ACA, or Obamacare) has been falsely promoted as a huge success. While the state health care department has reported that Medi-Cal enrollment will surge from 7.9 million before ACA implementation to 11.5 million in 2014-15, hundreds of thousands of new applicants have experienced months of coverage delays.

Moreover, the program allows for coverage to those with “deferred action status.” In reality, many of these youths qualifying for Medi-Cal (California’s Medicaid program) are confronted with various difficulties, such as a convoluted 35-page form requiring Social Security number and tax filing status. Parents whose children are DACA-eligible are understandably hesitant to volunteer themselves to the possibility of targeting by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). In addition, many Medi-Cal workers may simply be unaware of the eligibility of DACA beneficiaries and CalHEERS, California’s online enrollment portal, does not recognize DACA status.

Contrary to the media explanation for the lapse in health care coverage as merely a matter of inter-agency miscommunication, the underlying causes for the denial of coverage are not wholly reducible to bureaucratic-technical mishaps. They are, in fact, a natural consequence of the callous and inhuman character of US immigration policy—DACA being an expression of it—combined with the nature of Obamacare as a major

gift to the insurance industry.

DACA was put into effect by the Obama administration in June 2012, largely as part of a cynical maneuver to court the Latino vote in time for the 2012 election. The pretenses of a turn toward a more “humane” immigration policy belie the fact that the Obama administration has already deported over 2 million undocumented immigrants, surpassing the amount of deportations carried out by the Bush administration over the course of its two terms.

The DACA program grants a two-year reprieve from deportation to those undocumented immigrant youths who meet a series of draconian criteria. Those applying for deferred action must register with the DHS as “illegal” immigrants in order to be granted the two-year reprieve, effectively placing themselves at the mercy of the agency. Applicants must also pay an onerous \$465 biometrics and filing fee.

As the WSWS wrote shortly after DACA’s implementation, “Once registered, immigrants still have no path to citizenship and their legal status is only temporary. Even if there is no immediate double-cross, the condition of the newly registered would represent only the regularization of their status as an exploited underclass. Obama is declaring these immigrant youth good enough to work for the minimum wage or less, but not entitled to basic democratic rights, let alone full citizenship.”

Only a small minority of the 11.7 million undocumented immigrants in the United States would qualify for DACA’s stringent requirements. As of now, DACA has been extended to only slightly over 500,000 of these people—that is, roughly 4 percent of the total population of undocumented immigrants.

This health care dilemma in California comes amidst the ongoing “border crisis” in which tens of thousands

of children, accompanied by their parents or traveling alone, are fleeing bleak conditions in their home countries in Central America in order to seek refuge, only to find themselves corralled into detention centers and processed for deportation.

The blame for the crisis in immigration lies entirely at Washington's feet. The conditions which impel waves of immigrant youths and their parents to undertake the perilous trek to the US-Mexico border can be traced back to an entire history of US imperialist intervention in Latin America. There is a direct and irrefutable causal chain from US backing of right-wing dictatorships, brutal repression, and the role of US intelligence agencies in fomenting the drug war and the growth of drug cartels and gang violence that have made conditions in Central America in particular so utterly without prospect for wide layers of the population.

According to a recent report by Pew Research, in 1992, immigration offenses made up 5 percent of federal convictions. By 2012 that number had jumped to 30 percent, most of these convictions for illegal reentry. Such figures reflect not only the deepening social crisis in these countries, but the extent of the desperation of those who repeatedly attempt to gain access to the country. Washington remains impassive and indifferent to the wreckage and human cost of intervention in "its backyard," going ahead with plans to escalate the militarization of the border.

Democratic administrations have proven themselves to be no less ruthless than Republicans in the persecution of undocumented immigrants. The history of immigration "reform" is a history of false starts, reversals and increased repression. DACA itself is the logical consequence and repackaging of the reactionary character of the DREAM Act, which failed in the Senate.

Moreover, Obama's health care "reform" has revealed itself to be a massive handout to the major insurance companies, allowing employers to increasingly shift the burden of health care costs to working people.

Five million low-wage workers, unable to afford any of the plans on the health care exchanges—but making "too much" money to be covered by Medicaid (i.e., anything above a median of 46 percent of the poverty line, which amounts to \$9,000 a year)—will likely

remain uninsured.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact