

Obamacare coverage terminated for 430,000 immigrants

Kate Randall
15 September 2015

The US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) announced last week that about 430,000 people who shopped for health insurance under the Affordable Care Act (ACA) have been stripped of their health insurance this year due to unresolved immigration status or citizenship inconsistencies.

The number of terminated plans is double that of last year, when about 212,000 immigrants lost their coverage under the legislation commonly known as Obamacare. Immigrant rights advocates say that those seeing their coverage terminated have received confusing requests from HHS on what documents are required to prove their immigration status.

The number of insurance cutoffs could in fact be higher, as terminations have only been calculated for the 37 states that are utilizing the federal HealthCare.gov web site. This means that states with large immigrant populations, such as New York and California, that are running their own web sites are not included in the tally.

The National Immigration Law Center (NILC) says it believes the overwhelming majority of those losing coverage are documented US residents and citizens caught up in an inefficient and bureaucratic system for checking documents.

NILC said in a statement: “The majority of these immigrants attempted, often repeatedly, to submit the appropriate documentation needed to resolve the inconsistencies but faced barriers such as not being notified about what they needed to submit in a language they could understand. As a result, thousands of immigrants who depend on these plans for their health and wellbeing have lost their plans for avoidable reasons that have not been adequately addressed by HHS.”

Obamacare bars undocumented immigrants and their

children access to the ACA health care exchanges where health coverage is offered for purchase from private insurers. These individuals and families are thus barred access to even the modest subsidies offered to some low and middle-income people to buy insurance on the insurance exchanges.

In an effort to prove to Republican and other opponents of the ACA that they are following the letter of the law, and that no undocumented immigrants are enrolling, Obama administration officials at HHS are now strictly abiding by the 95-day window stipulated under the legislation for resolution of immigration status issues. The result is that many people who should be entitled to coverage are being denied.

HHS spokesman Ben Wakana said in a statement that in 2014 “we had the authority to provide consumers more flexibility—we were not taking action on the strict time line. In 2015, we moved to the time line of about three months, so consumers need to act quickly to submit supporting documentation.”

Immigrant advocates have pointed out that people without documents would be unlikely to risk alerting a federal agency by applying for taxpayer-subsidized benefits. “Somebody who is trying to submit documents over and over ... is someone who believes they have an eligible immigration status,” Angel Padilla, the NILC’s health policy analyst, told the Associated Press.

In a test of Obamacare’s anti-immigrant policies, investigators for the congressional Government Accountability Office (GAO) successfully enrolled fictitious individuals through HealthCare.gov in 2014. Eight of the bogus beneficiaries were asked by HHS to submit additional documentation, consisting of paperwork for verifying income, to prove identity and citizenship.

The GAO said that in some of these cases HealthCare.gov failed to communicate to the fake enrollees whether the submitted documents were acceptable. “We did not always know the current status of our applications or specific documents required in support of them,” the GAO said in a report this summer.

The termination this year of hundreds of thousands of immigrants’ plans makes clear that immigrants and their families entitled to subsidized insurance under Obamacare are undoubtedly running into similar roadblocks and being denied coverage.

While the uninsured rate for Hispanic adults ages 18-64 dropped from about 40 percent in 2013 to about 28 percent in the first three months of 2015, according to a government survey, Hispanics are still more likely to be uninsured than people of any other ethnic group.

President Obama has touted the ACA’s coverage of documented immigrants as one of the greatest benefits of his health care legislation. The fact that the ACA outright denies insurance to undocumented immigrants and their children goes unmentioned.

The ACA’s arbitrary denial of insurance is of a piece with Obama’s immigration policy, in which some 4 million have been deported since 2009—more than the Bush administration deported during its eight years in office.

The *Los Angeles Times* reported in March that over the previous 18 months more than 7,700 immigrant children, ranging in age from toddlers to adolescents, had been deported from the US without ever appearing in court. The majority of these children were sent back to Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras, where they face desperate poverty and violence, byproducts of a long history of oppression by American imperialism.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact