



WHY PROVIDING DRIVERS' LICENSES TO IMMIGRANTS IS A PUBLIC HEALTH & HEALTH CARE ISSUE: THE CASE FOR SUPPORTING THE I DRIVE COLORADO CAMPAIGN

Legislators should consider the significant public health benefits of providing Colorado's immigrants with a standard form of identification and the ability to drive legally.

In 2013, the Colorado state legislature passed SB 251, also known as The Colorado Road and Community Safety Act, which allowed up to six Colorado DMV offices to offer driver's licenses to immigrants without documentation residing in Colorado. The program was seen as a key step toward improving the safety of Coloradans on the road by allowing immigrants to take vision and road tests, obtain a license, and secure car insurance. Built on a self-funded model (licenses for these immigrants cost \$79 per applicant, versus the \$25 for other Colorado residents), the program was intended to place no additional burden on taxpayers.

Since the law passed, many of the 120,000 immigrants eligible for this program have been facing major difficulties in obtaining a driver's license, and an additional 60,000 are anticipated to become eligible due to the rescission of DACA and TPS (temporary protected status). The legislature cut the program's budget and used the license fees to fund other legislative priorities. As a result, the number of participating DMV offices across the state dropped from six to three, severely limiting the number of appointments available and forcing immigrants to travel long distances to apply for a license. The budgetary cut also included a directive that DMV offices in Grand Junction and Colorado Springs close once 60,000 total licenses in Colorado are granted, which was based on early estimates of eligibility. This cap is expected to be reached in 2018, meaning only one office would remain unless further action is taken, and this one office would be in Denver, which would especially limit access for immigrants located in rural areas of the state.

Additionally, a minor drafting error incurred major inefficiencies in the program by erroneously excluding some immigrants from this program, specifically immigrants who have a Social Security Number as granted in the 1990s. Before welfare reform at the federal level passed in 1996 (the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act), immigrants received valid Social Security Numbers. Additionally, there are some others who were granted temporary status through work visas. SB 18-108, if passed, would include this group of immigrants.

Last but not least, SB 18-108 would also enable qualifying applicants to renew their driver's licenses online as they are currently not allowed to do so. This will streamline the renewals



process, rather than increasing demand for appointments in already overwhelmed system limited to Aurora, Denver, Grand Junction, or Colorado Springs offices.

In an effort to address the myriad issues, the *I Drive Colorado* campaign was established to advocate for greater access to driver's licenses for immigrants without documentation, and to specifically for 2018, bring changes to the law through legislative and budgetary fixes. As the campaign supports SB 18-108 to improve upon SB 13-251, **legislators should consider the significant public health benefits of providing Colorado's immigrants with a standard form of identification and the ability to drive legally.**

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR HEALTH CARE

There is a strong connection between a person's access to reliable transportation and their ability to access health care when they need it. In the 2017 Colorado Health Access Survey, 309,650 Coloradans said they did not get the care they needed because they lacked transportation to the doctor's office or the doctor's office was too far away. While this number is not exclusively immigrants, challenges with transportation result in no care or delayed care, as well as worse health outcomes.

Without transportation, people delay care for themselves and family members, which could lead to worsening conditions, reliance on emergency transportation and emergency room use, and even death. When people are able to safely transport themselves and their family members to the doctor's office for routine check-ups or for more urgent needs, health care issues are addressed in a more timely manner and reliance on the 911 system is reduced. Despite the advances made in metro Denver and in the rest of the state in expanding public transportation infrastructure, the significant gaps leave people with little alternative but to rely on their own personal transportation.

Additionally, health care systems in Colorado have shared anecdotally that in an attempt to save money on emergency room costs and to increase more consistent access to care, they have had to build into their budgets support for non-emergent medical transportation for anyone who does not have a way to get to the doctor. If more Coloradans were able to access a driver's license and transport themselves, the cost to the system could be reduced.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH

Immigrants having access to driver's licenses has the potential for lasting impact on the health and safety of all Coloradans, which cannot be overstated. The social determinants of health help us understand that health is determined by the structural conditions in which people live, work, learn, play, grow and age. As a social determinant of health, transportation determines families' ability to access health care, secure basic necessities, and fully take part in the life of



their community. Colorado's immigrants help drive our economy and contribute to the rich fabric of our communities. Providing opportunity for immigrants to lead healthy and productive lives benefits us all. Allowing these Coloradans to obtain a driver's license is therefore an important step toward making Colorado a healthier state.

HEALTHY CHOICES ARE OUT OF REACH WITHOUT PERSONAL TRANSPORTATION

Beyond direct access to health care services, barriers to personal transportation can also affect a person's health in several other ways. Without freedom of movement, immigrants face unnecessary challenges in securing basic human needs, such as healthy foods, safe housing, good education opportunities for children, well-paying jobs, and more. Data shows that 40% of what contributes to an individual's health are social and economic factors, such as income, education, and community safety. Another 30% of an individual's health is determined by health behaviors, but our health behaviors are determined by the choices we have available to make. The lack of personal transportation makes a simple trip to the grocery store difficult, hindering one's ability to choose to purchase healthy food products. It can also force families to factor in the availability of nearby public transit options in deciding where to live. In turn, this might mean making sacrifices on the quality of housing -- and potentially being exposed to lead, mold, and unsafe structures -- or having to default to the neighborhood school, regardless of quality. Lacking any of these necessities could contribute to worse health outcomes for immigrants and higher health care costs overall.

DRIVER'S LICENSES TO PROTECT IMMIGRANTS AND THE PUBLIC

To get a driver's license, people must first pass required examinations, such as traffic law and road sign tests and vision examinations. These requirements improve safety on the road and protect other drivers. Obtaining a driver's license also makes it easier to acquire automobile insurance, which has been linked to safer driving conditions overall. Multiple studies indicate a correlation between uninsured drivers and fatal automobile accidents. Studies also indicate that if more motorists are insured in the state, automobile insurance costs would likely decrease across the board, freeing up resources for other life necessities. Specifically in California, which passed AB 60 in 2013, granting licenses to 600,000 immigrants saw a reduction in hit-and-run by 4,000 or 10%. They also saw a savings of \$3.5 million in out-of-pocket expenses as well.

IMMIGRANTS WITH DRIVER'S LICENSES PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITIES

Fear of deportation breeds mistrust of our hardworking law enforcement agencies and is a major barrier to immigrants' ability to engage with institutions and their communities. For example, police departments in several large cities across the US are seeing a decline in reporting of sexual assault and domestic violence among Latinos, where among non-Latinos, reporting has remained either unchanged or has risen. Specifically, in Denver in 2017, Latinos reporting crimes dropped 12% while among non-Latinos, reporting had arisen 36%. In Houston, they saw a 42% decrease in Latino victims reporting rape, and in Los Angeles, they saw a 25%



decline in sexual assault reports and 10% decline in domestic violence reports. While not all Latinos are immigrants, this is a proxy for understanding changed behaviors among immigrants. From anecdotes, the reason behind this is heightened fear of deportation, which decreases safety among immigrant communities as well as their ability to trust critical institutions.

Because the original bill explicitly bans law enforcement from using these driver's licenses for deportation purposes, immigrants can drive without the fear that driving-related infractions could result in their deportation or their family's. As a standard piece of identification, driver's licenses help facilitate immigrants' interactions with businesses, government agencies, and the community at large. The resulting sense of safety and belonging is critical to any individual's social and professional trajectory.

Immigrants who can safely travel from their home to their place of work (or while on the job) may also have more options for employment, which would both help their families' financial stability and improve Colorado's health systems and economy. Home health workers, for example, are critical assets to the health care industry caring for people in their homes, and the ability to drive from one patient's home to the next is critically important.

SUPPORTING THE / DRIVE COLORADO CAMPAIGN

Based on the demonstrated public health benefits of enabling immigrants without documentation to qualify for Colorado driver's licenses, the following organizations express our full support for the *I Drive Colorado* campaign and its objectives to:

- Address the DMV appointment cap
- Allow for online renewals of current license-holders
- Enable individuals with taxpayer identification numbers or Social Security numbers to qualify for the program

Senators Larry Crowder and Don Coram are sponsoring Senate Bill 18-108 to advance the latter two priorities of the campaign; Representatives Jonathan Singer and Jeni Arndt are sponsoring this in the House.

Achieving these objectives will be paramount to safeguarding and improving Colorado's public health. Signatories of this white paper are committed to working with the *I Drive Colorado* campaign, along with state and local leaders, community members, advocates, and health care providers to improve the health of all Coloradans.

Health and health equity organizations endorsing the campaign include, but are not limited to:
Center for Health Progress (formerly Colorado Coalition for the Medically Underserved)
American Academy of Pediatrics - Colorado Chapter



Asian Pacific Development Center
Clinica Tepeyac
Clinica Colorado
Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council
Colorado Center on Law and Policy
Colorado Children's Campaign
Colorado Children's Immunization Coalition
Colorado Community Health Network
Colorado's Community Safety Net Clinics
Colorado Consumer Health Initiative
Colorado Cross Disability Coalition
Colorado Fiscal Institute
CREA Results
Full Circle of Lake County, Inc.
Health District of Northern Larimer County
Kids First Health Care
Metro Community Provider Network
One Colorado Education Fund
Oral Health Colorado
Padres y Jovenes Unidos
Pueblo Triple Aim Coalition
Rocky Mountain Youth Clinics
Tri-County Health Network
United For A New Economy (formerly FRESC: Good Jobs, Strong Communities)
Young Invincibles

The I Drive Colorado campaign is led by:

Together Colorado
Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition
Mi Familia Vota
Colorado People's Alliance
American Friends Service Committee

Contact the communications lead of the campaign, Cristian Solano-Córdova (Cristian@coloradoimmigrant.org) for the full list of endorsing organizations as well as additional detail about the campaign. For more on the health perspective, contact Aubrey Hill (aubrey.hill@centerforhealthprogress.org).



SOURCES

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[Denver Post](#)

[Pew Charitable Trusts](#)

[American Immigration Council](#)

[University of California](#)

[ACLU Ohio](#)

[New York Times](#)

[The Atlantic](#)

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[Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)

[County Health Rankings](#)

[Newsweek](#)