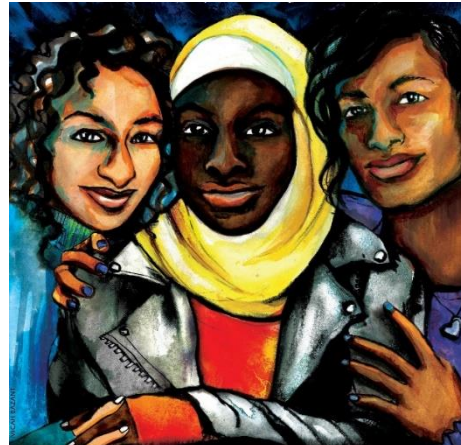


The Ventura County Health Care Agency is responsible for protecting the health and well-being of all their jurisdiction’s residents. This includes **over 191,000 immigrants** who live, work, attend school, vote, and engage in everyday activities in Ventura County.<sup>1</sup>

Our health department’s guiding vision is to be a place where everyone – no matter who you are, where you live, how much money you make, or the color of your skin – leads a healthy, fulfilling, and productive life. To achieve this vision, we cannot solely focus on providing health education, access to healthcare and treating the sick. We have to work across sectors to address the broad factors (economic, social, environmental, political, and structural conditions) that influence people’s health and the options available to them. And we must ensure that all residents have access to the resources, opportunities, and power that is needed to achieve health and prosperity.

Throughout our nation’s history, immigrants have often faced exclusion and been denied access to resources that support basic needs such as healthcare, employment, housing, and social services.<sup>2</sup>



Artwork by Micah Bazant

In order to achieve our vision of community health and safety we must work to reform any policies that systemically target and discriminate against any group of people, including immigrants.

### Background: Immigration in Ventura County

#### immigrants =

**Naturalized U.S. citizens**

**Lawful permanent residents**  
(green card holders)

**Temporary migrants**  
(such as foreign students)

**Humanitarian migrants**  
(including refugees/asylees)

**Other foreign-born residents**  
(who were not U.S. citizens at birth)

As the 23<sup>rd</sup> most diverse county in California<sup>3</sup>, Ventura County is home to over 849,000 people of varying racial, ethnic, national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. **Nearly 1 in 4 Ventura County residents (23%) is an immigrant.** This includes at least 191,162 naturalized U.S. citizens, lawful permanent residents, temporary migrants, humanitarian migrants, and other foreign-born residents who were not U.S. citizens at birth.<sup>1,5</sup>

Available data suggests that nearly half of immigrants in Ventura County are naturalized U.S. citizens and almost another fifth have some other form of documented

status.<sup>1,6</sup> This suggests **roughly 2 out of 3 immigrants are documented.** While there is no official count, a 2013 estimate indicates that Ventura County is home to about 69,000 undocumented immigrants.<sup>6</sup>

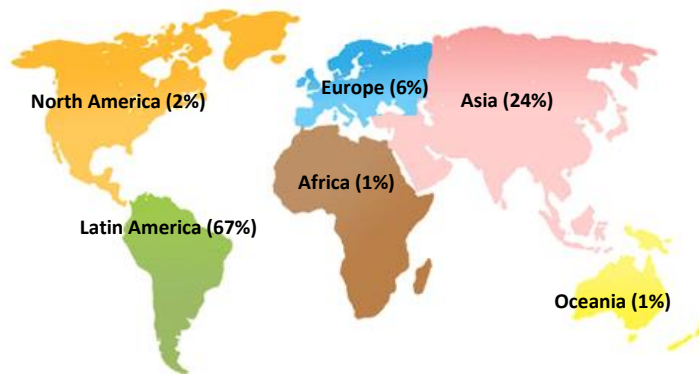
Most live in families with U.S. citizens and/or other immigrants with a range of different immigration statuses.

Driven by a complex array of factors including globalization, global economic inequality, foreign policies, and conditions in home countries such as poverty and oppression,<sup>7</sup> immigrants come to Ventura County from all over the world (largely Latin America followed by Asia).<sup>8</sup> Most seek a better life for themselves and/or families, including increased safety, freedom, and opportunity. In recent years, increased violence and other pressures in Central America has led to an unprecedented increase in the number of unaccompanied immigrant youth (UIY) coming to the U.S. without a parent or guardian.<sup>9,10</sup> Ventura County is home to the 16<sup>th</sup> highest number of UIY released to sponsors in California.<sup>11</sup>



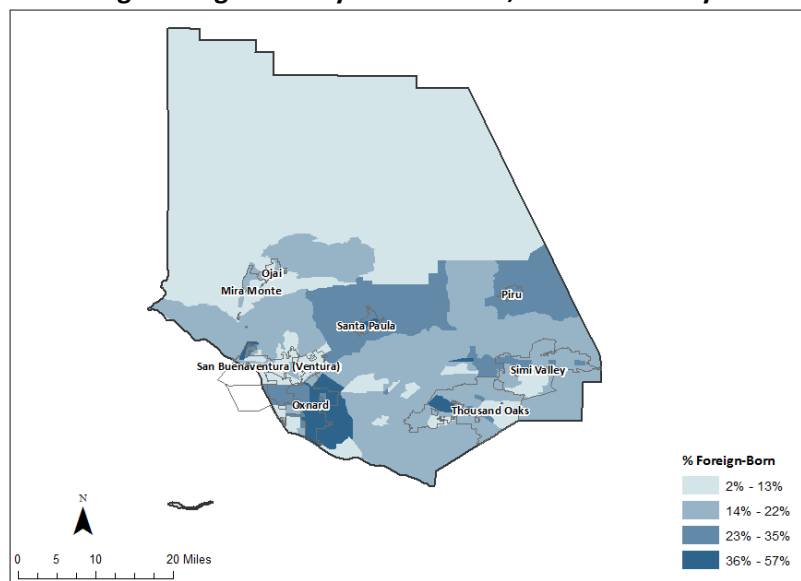
Immigrants live throughout cities in Ventura County. They make up over one third of people living in Oxnard (38% of the population), and almost one in five people in Thousand Oaks (20%), Simi Valley (18%), and the city of Ventura (16%).<sup>13</sup>

**Foreign-Born Residents of Ventura County by Place of Birth**



Immigrants are a vital and integral part of the social fabric of this county and nation. **Nearly two thirds of immigrants in Ventura County have been living in the U.S. for 17 or more years.**<sup>12</sup> As long-time residents, immigrants (and many of their U.S. born children) have developed extensive ties within schools and workplaces and made positive contributions to the larger community.

**Percentage Foreign-Born by Census Tract, Ventura County**



Source: Public Health Alliance of Southern California, with data from the American Community Survey, 2015

**Immigrants contribute to the local, state, and national economy as:**

Workers  
Job creators  
Tax payers  
Homeowners  
Consumers

**Immigrants contribute substantially to the local, state, and national economy as workers, job creators, tax payers, homeowners, and consumers.** In California, immigrants comprise 35% of the state workforce, over 33% of business owners, and pay over \$3 billion in annual state and local taxes.<sup>14,15,16</sup> **In Ventura County, nearly 1 out of 3 workers (30%) in the civilian labor force are immigrants.** In addition, almost a quarter of homeowners (23%) are immigrants.<sup>17</sup>

Immigration has an overall positive impact on long-term economic growth in this country. Immigrants typically contribute more through income, payroll, and other taxes to support public programs like Medicare and Social Security than they receive in government benefits, even though many of the immigrants who contribute to these programs will never have an opportunity to benefit from them.<sup>18,19</sup>

While immigrants have relatively high employment rates, they are more likely to work in low-wage jobs, less likely to have health insurance from employers, and more likely to face barriers to accessing health and human service programs.<sup>20</sup> Immigrants also often face extreme social vulnerability resulting from linguistic isolation, challenging processes of acculturation in the face of discrimination, and the inability to access basic needs such as housing and medical care.<sup>21</sup> Together, these factors present **multiple and cumulative risks to the physical and mental health of immigrants and their often mixed-status families, which, in turn, have far-reaching implications for the broader community.**

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### **Immigration Policy/Culture & Links to Health**

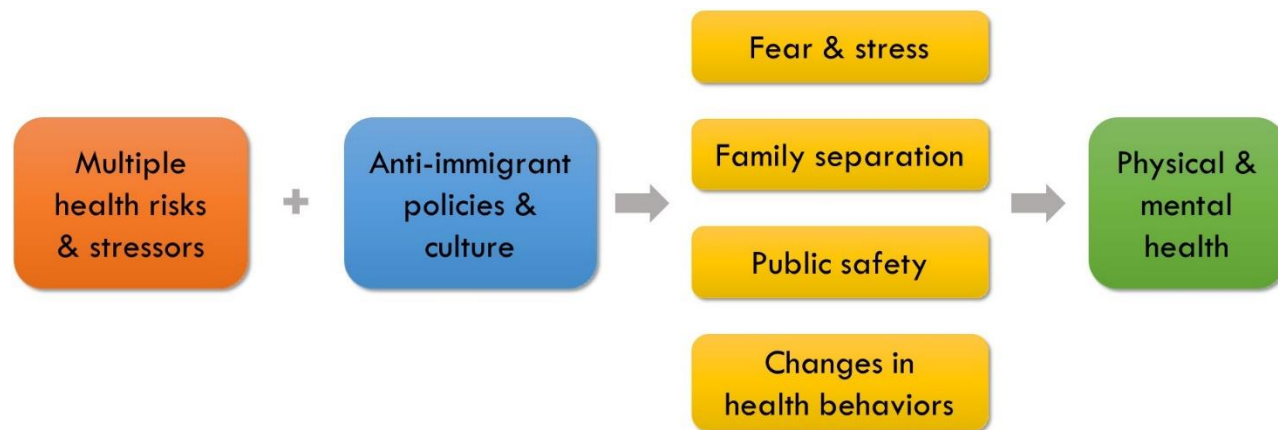
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Immigration policies can promote immigration and support immigrant integration into communities or be restrictive and isolate or exclude immigrants from the broader community.<sup>22</sup> While currently increasing in scale and intensity, anti-immigrant policies and sentiments are not new in this country. Throughout U.S. history and especially during times of economic turmoil or foreign wars, nativist fears have surged and anti-immigrant laws have been enacted (e.g., Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, Immigration Act of 1924, Japanese Internment Executive Order of 1942, California Proposition 187).<sup>23</sup>

The past decade has witnessed both pro- and anti-immigrant policies in the U.S. At the federal level, under the previous administration, funding for immigration enforcement increased and the Priority Enforcement Program (PEP) was established, leading to increased deportations. While federal policies increased immigration enforcement, a wave of pro-immigrant policies were passed at state and local levels, including legislation that expanded access to health care and led to programs like My Health LA, Healthy San Francisco, and expansion of Medicaid. Efforts were made to decrease the entanglement between law enforcement and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which led to the termination of many agreements regarding federal immigration enforcement between state/local law enforcement agencies and the Department of Homeland Security.

More recently under the current administration, the introduction of anti-immigrant policies, such as executive orders that promote selective immigration bans/restrictions, more border security, and aggressive immigration enforcement, together with a rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric and sentiments, has led to increased anxiety and fear amongst immigrant communities.<sup>24,25,26</sup> In this political and social climate, the role that state and local governments can play to ensure protection and promotion of health for all communities is increasingly important.

Based on the extant literature and our local experience in Ventura County, this issue brief looks at how anti-immigrant policies/practices impact the physical and mental health of immigrants and the larger community, with a focus on four key pathways including: 1) fear and stress; 2) family separation; 3) public safety; and 4) impacts to programs and services.



### ***Fear & Stress***

Immigrants already face multiple, compounding sources of stress and trauma before, during, and after migration to this country. The dire conditions that drive immigrants to leave their home countries; dangers they encounter while in transit; difficult processes of acculturation, discrimination, and “othering” they can experience; and substandard living or working conditions they often endure all leave immigrants at increased risk of psychological distress.

**Once in the U.S., policies and social climate that threaten immigrant communities increase stress, anxiety and hopelessness in immigrants of all status, adding to previous traumatic experiences.<sup>27,28</sup> This stress is damaging to both physical and mental health, and its impacts extend throughout our communities.**

Stress combined with fear of deportation for oneself or for a family or community member has wide ranging health impacts:

- Fear and stress, particularly prolonged exposure to serious stress – known as toxic stress – can harm the developing brain as well as multiple organ systems, increasing risk for numerous health problems.<sup>29,30</sup>
- **Fear and stress experienced by children are associated with poorer health outcomes, including mental health issues, and decreased child educational and behavioral outcomes.<sup>31</sup>** A recent study found that nearly 30% of undocumented parents indicated that their U.S.-citizen children are afraid either all or most of the time. Nearly half said that their child had been anxious, and three-quarters said that a child has shown symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).<sup>32</sup>

[INSERT LOCAL COMMENT, SUCH AS:  
 “Community health and wellness rely on people feeling safe when accessing care and services. When residents feel safe, they proactively engage in all efforts to keep their families and communities healthy.”  
 - Op Ed by Alameda County Board of Supervisors  
 Wilma Chan & Keith Carson]  
*East Bay Express, May 2017*

- **Fear and stress about immigration policy and enforcement has been found to lead to low birth-weight in babies born to both immigrant and U.S.-born Latinas.**<sup>33</sup> Birth outcomes are important, as they are associated with long-term health, educational and economic outcomes.<sup>34</sup>
- Immigrants, such as unaccompanied immigrant youth, who have experienced previous trauma in their home country and on their journey to seek refuge are more vulnerable to adverse mental health outcomes resulting from stress.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, stress that serves as a reminder of past traumatic events can activate or re-activate symptoms of PTSD.<sup>36</sup>

[INSERT LOCAL STORY, SUCH AS:

**COPING WITH TRAUMA, STRESS, AND NOW FEAR:  
The Experience of an Immigrant Crime Victim**

A client of ours reported a crime to law enforcement. Since the new policies, she regrets having done so and is afraid that because law enforcement has her information ICE may be able to one day access it. Furthermore, her housemates know that she reported the crime and since they are undocumented immigrants themselves they fear that they will be found through her. They have asked her to move out. She is now dealing with the trauma from the crime, fear regarding these policies, and now having to look for a new home.

*- Staff, Rape Crisis Center, Southern California]*

### **Family Separation**

**Almost half of children in Ventura County have at least one parent born outside the U.S.**<sup>37</sup> Current immigration policies and laws are based in part on the ideal of family unity. However, in practice, those policies/laws often separate families. Between 2003 and 2013 one-fifth to one-quarter of the 3.7 million people deported from the U.S. were parents of U.S. born children.<sup>38</sup>

Parents are a critical influence on child development and future success, so the sudden loss of a parent can have long-term impacts for a child.<sup>39</sup> **Family separation can harm mental health, physical health, educational/behavioral outcomes, and economic well-being.** Children with a parent that has been deported often suffer from irregular sleeping habits, increased anger and withdrawal, and decreases in academic achievement.<sup>40</sup> When one parent is detained or deported, the remaining spouse or partner often experiences depression, which can affect children and cause poor developmental outcomes.<sup>41</sup>

Families also struggle economically with the loss of income and household support after a family member is deported, threatening safety and economic security that can affect children's long-term development.<sup>38,40</sup> Children who have no other option but to be placed into the foster care system after their parents are deported are often separated from their families for years, if not indefinitely.<sup>42</sup> In 2011, nationwide, 5,100 (of 397,607 total) children of deported parents were in the foster care system, and

between 2011 and 2016 an estimated 15,000 more children were estimated to have been placed into foster care after their parents were deported.<sup>42</sup>

[INSERT LOCAL STORY, SUCH AS:

SHAKING AND BREAKING UP OUR FAMILY:

The Experience of an Immigrant Family Threatened by Detention & Deportation

I saw a patient recently at an evening clinic at a local school who was suffering from headaches. An interview and exam led me to believe these were related to stress. As we explored sources of stress for her, she revealed that neither she nor her husband are documented but their only child was born in this country and is, therefore, a citizen. Should they be deported, she has no idea how she will deal with finding care for her child who is 8 years old.

- *Staff, Neighborhood Clinic, Southern California]*

## **Public Safety**

**Immigrants in the U.S. commit crimes at very low rates, and communities with policies that promote the integration of immigrants experience lower crime rates.**<sup>43,44,45</sup>

**Research indicates that when local law enforcement is able to focus on community safety and avoid entanglement with federal immigration enforcement efforts, communities are safer and residents stay more engaged in the local economy.**<sup>46</sup> This has benefits for individual households, communities, counties, and the overall economy.<sup>45</sup>

**Fear of deportation increases immigrants' vulnerability to crime and violence and decreases overall public safety.**<sup>14,44,47</sup> Immigrants who witness or are victims of crime are less likely to report them to authorities if they fear deportation for themselves or their family members.<sup>48,49,50</sup> Increased involvement of police in immigration enforcement leads to a heightened mistrust of law enforcement among both undocumented and U.S.-born Latinos.<sup>51</sup> Threat of deportation compromises the safety of victims of human trafficking, domestic and gender-based violence who may not report abuse out of fears related to immigration enforcement.<sup>42,52,53</sup> This fear and the reduction in crime reporting has been occurring at an increased rate in the current political climate, where, for example, ICE has articulated a policy to detain immigrants at courthouses.<sup>54</sup> It also increases immigrants' vulnerability to exploitation, including wage theft and human trafficking.<sup>55,56,57</sup> Beyond impacts to immigrant health and well-being, immigrant under-reporting of crimes is a threat to the public safety of all.

**An anti-immigrant climate can also lead to increased hate crimes against immigrants.** In the month following the November election, the Southern Poverty Law Center reported 315 hate incidents against immigrants across the nation.<sup>58</sup>

## **Impacts to Programs and Services**

### **Immigrants change health-seeking and health-supportive behaviors for themselves and their family members if they fear being stopped by police and potential deportation.** [27](#), [32](#), [59](#), [60](#), [61](#), [62](#), [63](#)

Across the country and in Ventura County, reports are **emerging that immigrants, including authorized residents, are avoiding or delaying health care and withdrawing from government programs that provide support for basic needs** out of fear of deportation, the uncertainty about the security of their personal information, and the potential impacts on a future path towards citizenship. [64](#), [65](#), [66](#), [67](#)

For example, staff from health clinics across Southern California have noticed that clinics serving primarily immigrant and Latino populations are seeing evidence that clients are not seeking care for critical health concerns and are missing prenatal appointments. This is very concerning because early prenatal care significantly reduces the risk for complications for both the mom and baby during pregnancy.

Additionally, staff working at many Women, Infants and Children (WIC) health department programs have been hearing from clients who are dropping out of the program due to fears that their participation will jeopardize their eligibility for a path to citizenship, and their worry that the information shared with the program will be turned over to immigration enforcement officials. WIC is an important program that helps to improve food security and supports the nutritional needs of low-income women and their young children, so, even though no immigrant will be deported, denied entry to the country or permanent status because they receive benefits from WIC, the impacts of decreased use of these resources will have serious, and potentially long term, impacts on children and families. [68](#)

Many systems to protect public health, such as monitoring disease outbreaks, rely on cooperation of residents with local and state agencies. If fear prevents staff from being able to reliably contact people at risk of exposure to a communicable disease, or deters people from seeking medical care and being screened for illnesses, all communities are put at risk. In addition to direct health risks, healthcare costs rise for all when utilization shifts from preventive services to higher-cost emergency care and hospitalization. [69](#)

A survey of staff at public health departments throughout Southern California reported that since November 2016 staff had witnessed or heard from clients about the following:

- Drops in program utilization or participation (44%)
- Being afraid to continue or sign up for public programs, services, and/or healthcare (66%)
- Increased fear, stress, or other mental and emotional health impacts (62%)
- Afraid to leave the house or neighborhood (56%)

Source: Public Health Alliance of Southern California and Bay Area Regional Health Inequities Initiative, Rapid Response Survey: Health Impacts of Federal Immigration Policy, May 2017.

[INSERT LOCAL STORY, SUCH AS:

**BEING SCARED SICK:**

**The Experience of Families Accessing Healthcare**

A family stopped attending case management sessions and stopped taking her young child to regional center assessment session despite an urgent need in having client assessed.

- Staff, Family Clinic, Southern California

Undocumented clients are not interested in enrolling in restricted Medi-Cal for fear of deportation.

- Staff, Children's Health Program, Southern California

Participant is scared that if they come to the WIC program offices, they will get deported. The participant's husband was deported a couple years back and their children are still receiving counseling due to the stress.

- Staff, WIC Program, Southern California]

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**Immigration Policy in Ventura County**

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Policies that attempt to isolate immigrants from the broader community are detrimental to individuals, communities, and our broader society. It is critical to the health of our communities and our country that we consider the public health ramifications of local, state, and federal immigration policies and practices and seek solutions that strengthen and improve public health.

[INSERT LOCAL POLICY AND POLICY ACTIONS HERE]

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**Recommendations**

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Shifts in the social and political climate around immigration have impacts that extend beyond individuals to affect entire communities including the schools, businesses and institutions that serve them. Our community and nation's health is harmed when any segments of the population experience discrimination, are subjected to policies that limit access to health-enabling resources, or feel targeted or threatened in ways that create a climate of fear, uncertainty, and mistrust. In order to address these impacts we need a multi-sector approach that also acknowledges the connection between local, state and federal policy.

The recommendations below offer concrete actions and goals that can be championed by organizations and agencies, and that collectively, will help to ensure the health and well-being of all of our residents, including immigrant communities.

### **1. Reduce fear and stress**

Support rapid response networks that provide legal and education services for residents impacted by immigration enforcement

Promote public messaging assuring that immigrants are welcome, safe, and belong in our communities

Collect and share facts and stories about contributions of immigrants to our communities, and that document health and social impacts of shifts in immigration policy

### **2. Promote health-seeking and health-supportive behaviors**

Affirm health agency commitments to provide services to all residents regardless of immigration status

Develop and communicate messages assuring all clients are safe and welcome when accessing health services

Ensure that policies/procedures are in place to protect the safety of clients and their personal information in spaces where health services are provided

Monitor changes in enrollment and utilization of health promoting programs and expand outreach to encourage clients to use available needed services

### **3. Increase public safety**

Support policies that separate local law enforcement and federal immigration enforcement, ensuring local resources are dedicated to community safety

Work with local law enforcement to ensure that reporting of crimes does not lead to deportation or other adverse consequences

### **4. Protect children and families**

Expand access to legal services for families

Protect the health and welfare of children by creating linkages to comprehensive services within schools and communities

Provide training and assistance for families to create plans for their dependents in the case of an emergency

### **5. Support civil rights and health for all**

Promote training for residents, including immigrants, about constitutional and civil rights

Reinforce our status as a welcoming place for all residents, regardless of national origin, religious beliefs, or immigration status

Protect against racial profiling based on “perceived” immigration status, ethnicity, religion, or national origin

Protect and expand access to affordable and quality health care for all

Support policies that improve the living and working conditions of vulnerable populations

Form multi-sector collaborations between community, advocacy, and government sectors to address health and build power amongst vulnerable populations, including immigrants

## ATTRIBUTION

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