

## RAND RESEARCH AREAS

THE ARTS  
 CHILD POLICY  
 CIVIL JUSTICE  
 EDUCATION  
 ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT  
 HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE  
 INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
 NATIONAL SECURITY  
 POPULATION AND AGING  
 PUBLIC SAFETY  
 SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
 SUBSTANCE ABUSE  
 TERRORISM AND  
 HOMELAND SECURITY  
 TRANSPORTATION AND  
 INFRASTRUCTURE  
 WORKFORCE AND WORKPLACE

# Immigrants and Health Care

## A Complex Picture

Immigrants to the United States are often identified as a vulnerable population—that is, at elevated risk of poor health and inadequate medical care. Studies have shown that, compared to the U.S.-born population, immigrants and their U.S.-born children typically have lower rates of health insurance, use less health care, and receive lower quality of care.

However, a recent article published by a team of RAND Health researchers shows that the picture is more complex. There are important differences among subgroups. Immigrants vary in ways that affect their access to care and quality of care, including differences in

- socioeconomic background
- immigration status
- limited English proficiency
- residential location
- stigma and marginalization.

Further, although limited English proficiency is related to poorer access to and lower quality of health care, an immigrant's first language may be an intervening factor. For example, the researchers cite a previous study that found that, among those with limited English proficiency, Spanish-speaking women in California were more likely to receive a Pap test over a three-year period than were women who spoke Vietnamese, Cantonese, Mandarin, or Korean.

Although most immigrants are relatively healthy and often experience better outcomes, including lower mortality, than their U.S.-born counterparts, their health often deteriorates over time in the United States. Limited access and poor quality of care likely play a role. That immigrants are a large and growing segment of the population—12 percent in 2007—has serious implications for the health of the nation.

The factors that make immigrants vulnerable to poor health and inferior medical care can be remedied, in part, through policies that apply to disadvantaged populations more generally, including those for living wages, access to education, decent housing, and safe jobs. However, health policies targeted specifically to immigrants will also likely be needed to expand access to care and improve quality. They include

- expanded health-insurance coverage through public- and private-sector initiatives
- broader implementation of cultural and linguistic standards for health care providers
- support of the medical safety net in communities that experience high influxes of immigrants.

This fact sheet is part of the RAND Corporation research brief series. RAND fact sheets summarize published, peer-reviewed documents.

## Corporate Headquarters

1776 Main Street  
 P.O. Box 2138  
 Santa Monica, California  
 90407-2138  
 TEL 310.393.0411  
 FAX 310.393.4818

© RAND 2008

Office of Congressional Relations | 703-413-1100 x5320 | [ocr@rand.org](mailto:ocr@rand.org) | [www.rand.org/congress](http://www.rand.org/congress)

---

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions of its research clients and sponsors. RAND® is a registered trademark.

**RAND Offices**

Santa Monica, CA • Washington, DC • Pittsburgh, PA • Jackson, MS / New Orleans, LA • Cambridge, UK • Doha, QA



# HEALTH

THE ARTS  
CHILD POLICY  
CIVIL JUSTICE  
EDUCATION  
ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT  
HEALTH AND HEALTH CARE  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS  
NATIONAL SECURITY  
POPULATION AND AGING  
PUBLIC SAFETY  
SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY  
SUBSTANCE ABUSE  
TERRORISM AND  
HOMELAND SECURITY  
TRANSPORTATION AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE  
WORKFORCE AND WORKPLACE

This PDF document was made available from [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org) as a public service of the RAND Corporation.

This product is part of the RAND Corporation research brief series. RAND research briefs present policy-oriented summaries of individual published, peer-reviewed documents or of a body of published work.

The RAND Corporation is a nonprofit research organization providing objective analysis and effective solutions that address the challenges facing the public and private sectors around the world.

---

## Support RAND

[Browse Books & Publications](#)

[Make a charitable contribution](#)

## For More Information

Visit RAND at [www.rand.org](http://www.rand.org)

Explore [RAND Health](#)

View [document details](#)

## Limited Electronic Distribution Rights

This document and trademark(s) contained herein are protected by law as indicated in a notice appearing later in this work. This electronic representation of RAND intellectual property is provided for non-commercial use only. Unauthorized posting of RAND PDFs to a non-RAND Web site is prohibited. RAND PDFs are protected under copyright law. Permission is required from RAND to reproduce, or reuse in another form, any of our research documents for commercial use. For information on reprint and linking permissions, please see [RAND Permissions](#).