

Proposed changes to immigration rules could cost California jobs, harm public health

Ninez A. Ponce, Laurel Lucia and Tia Shimada

Changes to “public charge” rules proposed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security could lead to losses of up to \$1.67 billion in federal benefits for California and even greater economic losses across the state.

What is the “public charge” test?

When a person applies for lawful permanent residency (a “green card”) or for a visa to enter the United States, U.S. immigration officials conduct what is called a “public charge” test to determine if that person may become primarily dependent on the government to meet their basic needs.

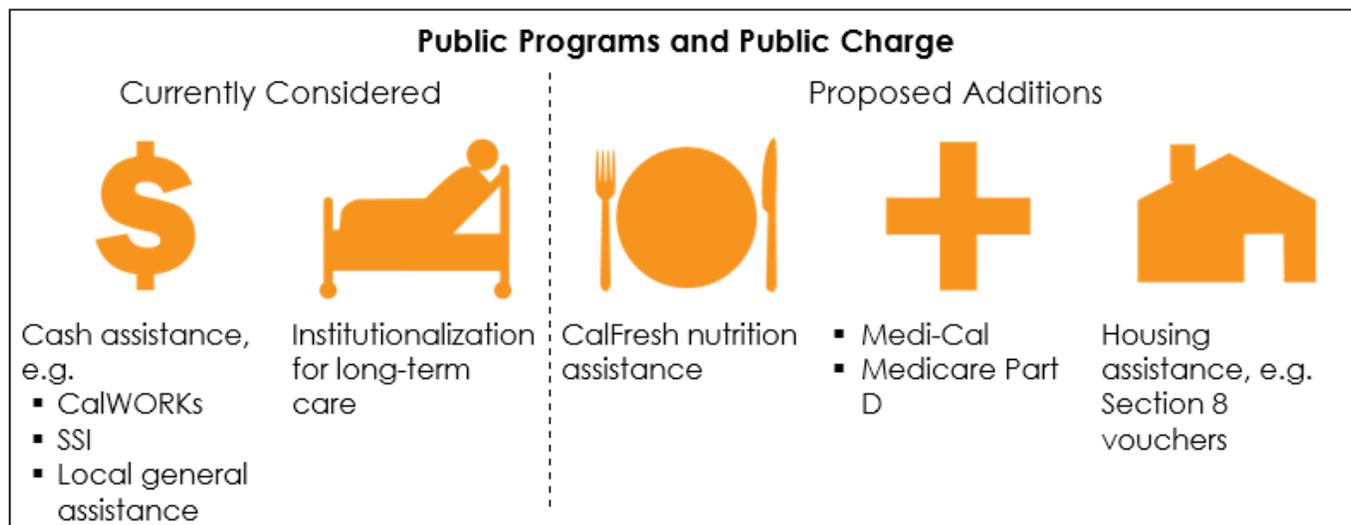
What changes are proposed to the public charge test?

- Currently, only two public benefits – cash assistance and long-term institutional care – are considered for the public charge test. Under the proposed changes to federal immigration rules, people could be denied status as lawful permanent residents if they've received certain health care, housing or nutrition assistance benefits (Figure 1).
- In addition, the proposed rule adds harsher standards for personal circumstances that make someone less likely to receive a green card or be granted entry to the U.S., such as having limited English proficiency, limited educational attainment, low income, being a child or being a senior.



Photo credit: iStock.com/GOLFX

Figure 1.



Take action: Submit a public comment

Public comments about the proposed changes to the public charge test can be submitted through December 10, 2018; all comments must be counted and considered by public officials before a final rule is issued. Visit the Protecting Immigrant Families website at <https://protectingimmigrantfamilies.org/> to learn more. Any individual, agency, or organization can submit a comment, and commenting on the proposed rule is not considered lobbying.

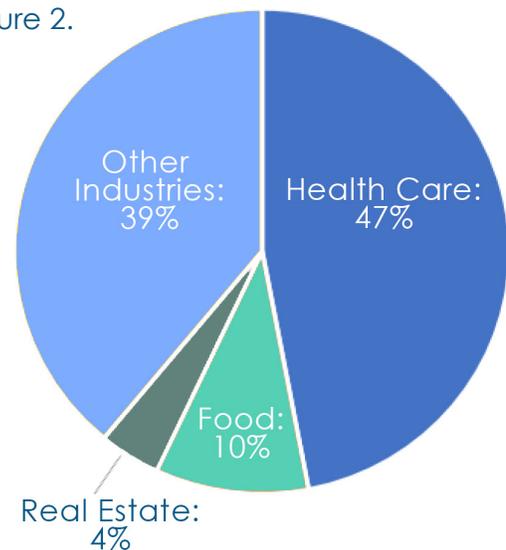
Negative effects on health and hunger

- The proposed changes to immigration rules are complex and could lead to misinformation, confusion and fear about enrollment in public programs. Analysis indicates that this “chilling effect” could impact up to 2.2 million Californians in immigrant families, most of whom would not actually be legally subject to the proposed new public charge test.
- If just 15 to 35 percent of those Californians in immigrant families disenroll from public programs, that is a loss of federal benefits for up to 765,000 people across the state.
- Disenrollment would increase poverty, hunger and poor health in communities statewide by reducing the resources that California residents have for health care, food and other basic necessities.
- Regardless of enrollment, among California's immigrant adults potentially impacted by the proposed rule:
 - Medi-Cal enrollees are 1.8 times more likely to have a usual place to get health care, and are 1.5 times more likely to have had a preventive care visit in the past year, compared with people who are uninsured, but eligible for Medi-Cal.
 - More than 400,000 adults are food insecure, which means that they lacked consistent access to enough food at some point in the past year. Disenrollment from CalFresh could increase food insecurity in California.
- Nearly 70 percent of California residents projected to disenroll from health care and nutrition assistance benefits would be children.
- Across California, disenrollment from CalFresh and Medi-Cal would most significantly impact Latinos (88 percent) and Asians (8 percent).

Lost Jobs

If proposed changes to the ‘public charge’ test go into effect, up to 17,700 jobs across California will no longer exist

Figure 2.



Negative economic effects across California

Analysis shows that if just 35 percent of those touched by the “chilling effect” disenroll from Medi-Cal and CalFresh:

- California could lose up to \$1.67 billion in federal benefits, yielding an even greater loss of spending throughout the broader state economy – \$2.80 billion – as the loss of those federal dollars has an economic ripple effect across industries.
- As many as 17,700 jobs could be eliminated statewide (Figure 2). An estimated 57 percent of the job losses would come from California's health care sector (8,400 jobs) and food-related industries (1,800 jobs).

“California could lose up to \$1.67 billion in federal benefits, yielding an even greater loss of spending throughout the broader state economy – \$2.8 billion – as the loss of those federal dollars has an economic ripple effect across multiple industries.”

The authors wish to thank the following contributors to this work: Riti Shimkhada, AJ Scheitler, Xiao Chen, Dahai Yue, Jared Call and Josue Chavarin.

This analysis was conducted by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research in partnership with the UC Berkeley Labor Center and California Food Policy Advocates, with support from the California Health Care Foundation and The California Endowment.

Citation: Ponce NA, Lucia L, Shimada T. December 2018. *Proposed changes to immigration rules could cost California jobs, harm public health.* Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, UC Berkeley Labor Center & California Food Policy Advocates.

