California’s Immigrant Adults Report Increased Psychological Distress and High Rates of Unmet Need for Mental Health Care

A study by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research reports declining mental health and increasing unmet mental health needs among immigrant adults in California from 2015–2021.

**Serious Psychological Distress (SPD) Among Immigrant Adults**

Changes in SPD among immigrant adults varied across socio-political factors such as length of stay, citizenship status, and English language proficiency between the two time periods.

- **6%** of all immigrants had SPD in 2015–2017, compared to **9%** of immigrants in 2019–2021.

**By time spent in the U.S.**

The group living in the U.S. for less than 5 years had the most significant percentage increase in SPD compared to all other groups.

- **Less than 5 years**: 5% to 12% (+140%)
- **15 years or more**: 6% to 9% (+50%)

**By citizenship status**

The groups with and without a green card had higher increases in SPD than naturalized citizens.

- **Naturalized**: 6% to 8% (+33%)
- **Noncitizen with green card**: 6% to 12% (+83%)
- **Noncitizen without green card**: 7% to 12% (+71%)

**By English language proficiency**

The proportion with SPD who speak only English was unchanged for 2015–2017 and 2019–2021, but other groups had increases.

- **English only**: 8% to 8% (0%)
- **English proficient**: 6% to 10% (+67%)
- **Limited or no English proficiency**: 6% to 8% (+33%)

**Have Unmet Needs for Mental Health Care**

More than **2 in 3 (67%)** immigrant adults with SPD did not see a healthcare provider for their mental health care needs from 2019–2021 despite reporting needing one.

Note: Rates of SPD varied by citizenship, time in the U.S. and English language skills

Source: 2015–2021 California Health Interview Survey
Read the policy brief: [https://ucla.in/3R9ju6c](https://ucla.in/3R9ju6c)