

FACT SHEET

Threats to Older Immigrants in Health Care, Economic Security, Housing & Elder Rights

APRIL 2025

Denny Chan, Managing Director, Equity Advocacy



INTRODUCTION

Within days of taking office, the Trump Administration started attacks on immigrant communities through executive orders, rescission of longstanding policy, and divisive rhetoric. The impact of these actions has created fear and chilled many immigrants from accessing basic services. Older immigrants are vital members of our families and communities, and the Administration's actions have serious consequences for them. This resource identifies major actions in health, economic security, housing, and elder rights impacting older immigrants as well as forthcoming and anticipated policies.

WHO ARE OLDER IMMIGRANTS?

More than [8 million U.S. residents](#) age 65 or older are immigrants. Many who settle in the United States as older adults are sponsored by adult children who immigrated to the U.S. as young adults, [and the majority of older immigrants](#) have lived in the United States for over 30 years. Older immigrants tend to have [limited English proficiency](#) (LEP) and little or no U.S. work experience. Compared to U.S.-born older adults, they are more likely to have [incomes below the poverty line](#). The disproportionate levels of poverty mean that many older immigrants continue to work, despite experiencing discrimination, and the vast majority do not qualify [for federally funded public benefits programs](#) until [five years](#) after they attain a "qualified" immigration status. For more about connections between immigration and older adults, including a discussion of older immigrants and the role of immigrants in the direct care workforce, see Justice in Aging's resource on connections between older adults and immigrants.

THREATS TO OLDER IMMIGRANTS

Across all the programs and services older immigrants rely on, older immigrants have already experienced a chilling effect from executive actions taken to date. For example, older immigrants may be less likely to participate in community activities at places of worship and schools, or seek health care or social services because of the [rescission of the longstanding protected areas policy](#), which previously excluded certain areas from immigration enforcement. Similarly, older immigrants may be less likely to interact with authorities and access

services after the Administration announced it would begin enforcing a World War II-era law [requiring that certain immigrants, including undocumented individuals, register](#) with the Department of Homeland Security. Advocates fear that these types of measures will drive immigrants away from accessing services while contributing to mistrust of government agencies, as failure to register and carry proof of registration can result in criminal and civil penalties.

In addition, after the Administration rescinded decades of guidance to agencies on how to serve individuals with LEP, older immigrants with LEP may experience increased difficulty accessing government programs and services in a language they understand through written translations or oral interpretation.

Health Care and Long-Term Services and Supports

Although immigrant qualification for public benefits is already extremely limited, the Administration has attempted to further restrict immigrants from accessing any benefits, including [health services](#). At the same time, the fear arising from increased immigration enforcement actions has already started to [affect the extent to which immigrants](#) participate in the direct care workforce, which provides care to older adults and people with disabilities.

We anticipate that the Administration will attempt to expand the public charge rule, hurting older immigrants' access to Medicare and Medicaid. Under the first Trump Administration's revision of [the public charge rule](#), benefits use by immigrant families [steeply declined](#). We also expect the Administration to revisit regulations implementing [Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act](#), the federal anti-discrimination statute specific to health care, to weaken protections based on intersectional discrimination, ethnicity, and limited English proficiency, among other protected classes. These weakened protections would make it harder to address discrimination in health care against older immigrants. In states that have expanded health care coverage to undocumented older adults through state-funded Medicaid, attempts to limit federal funding to those states could force them to revisit coverage to these individuals and jeopardize access to care, exacerbating health disparities. Likewise, Congressional cuts to Medicaid would likely force states to revisit coverage.

Economic Security and Housing

Increased immigration enforcement actions at homeless shelters have already instilled fear among older immigrants, other individuals accessing services, and service providers.

Future rulemaking to expand the public charge rule would hurt older immigrants' access to SSI (which is already limited) and housing benefits through a chilling effect and confusion. We also expect older immigrants' access to housing to potentially be curtailed through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s anticipated rulemaking to prevent mixed-status households from accessing federally subsidized housing, harming access for older immigrants and multi-generational families.

Elder Rights

The Administration's aggressive approach to immigration has included ending funding for many [federally funded legal services](#) that provide immigration assistance. This, in addition to the rising fear and uncertainty among immigrant communities, has meant that legal services providers have been unable to keep up with surging

demand. Additionally, due to aggressive immigration enforcement and rhetoric, older immigrants may be less likely to report elder abuse and other issues to Adult Protective Services, police, legal aid, and other government or social services agencies out of fear of immigration-related consequences.

While previous administrations had made efforts to improve data collection about marginalized communities, we anticipate the potential inclusion of a [citizenship question in the U.S. Census](#) and related efforts to weaken research on inequities, including on the basis of immigration status, which would inhibit better understanding of the experiences of older immigrants.

SELECTED ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Immigrants and Older Adults: Connections and Opportunities](#)
- [National Immigration Law Center, Overview of Immigrant Eligibility for Federal Programs](#)
- [National Immigration Law Center, Know Your Rights: What to Do if You Are Arrested or Detained by Immigration](#)
- [Justice in Aging, Older Immigrants and Medicare](#)
- [Social Security Administration, Spotlight on SSI Benefits for Noncitizens](#)