



Legislative Policy Priorities

Improving Latino Health Care Access

Latinos are the most uninsured population across the country. They represent **37%, 39%, and 36%** of all the uninsured population in the U.S., Texas, and TX Border communities respectively. The health disparities in Latino families and communities are intensified by the inequality in access to quality health care. The impact is devastating in terms of unnecessary suffering, costs, and lost productivity and self-sufficiency.

La Fe Policy Research and Education Center (*La Fe PREC*) is engaging advocates that demonstrate a commitment to positively impacting the bienestar (well-being) and health status of Latinos. Health insurance coverage is a critical component of bienestar and our ability to maintain good health.

Like education, access to health care enables Bienestar (well-being). The National Institute of Medicine and extensive research has demonstrated how health care access improves and helps maintain good health. Every family must have available, acceptable, and accountable access to quality health care. Therefore, we must help families help themselves by insuring equality of access to comprehensive quality health care.

La Fe PREC is educating and advocating for national and state-level legislative policies that expands health care access, reduces the appalling number of uninsured Latinos, and positively impacts their Bienestar and health status.

Latino Health Care Access Policy Priorities:

- Work toward comprehensive universal health insurance coverage for all Americans. Engage in the debate on the form and structure of universal coverage.
- Expand the Medicaid program insuring a comprehensive health care benefit package, transparency in cost-effective preventive and quality chronic disease management care, and performance-based health provider reimbursement.
- Reauthorize and expand the State Children Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) to ensure every eligible child under the age of 19 has coverage.
- The U.S./Mexico Border must be designated as a “*Health Improvement Zone*” recognizing the exacerbated disparities and inequalities in both health resources, and health problems and risks.
- Increase the number of health professionals who practice along the border.
- Develop policies that stimulate infrastructural growth and services.
- Encourage Comprehensive Immigration Reform that is bi-partisan and reflective of the interdependence on immigration in this country.

Issue 1 – Uninsured Crisis: The appalling number of uninsured in Texas and on the U.S. / Mexico Border is having a devastating impact on the bienestar and health status of our communities and overwhelming our limited social safety nets. But as the primary system for health coverage, Employer Sponsor Insurance, struggles to maintain in Texas and health care trend shift more personal responsibility and cost to individuals -real change is needed.

Policy Priority 1: *Due to uncontrolled health care cost and a high number of uninsured and under-insured, a Universal Health Care Coverage plan or major reforms is inevitable. But until then, key health policy priorities must enhance current Medicaid and SCHIP through:*

A. Strengthen Social Safety Nets by:

1. Expanding Medicaid coverage by increasing state funding to maximize federal matching dollars and insure more Texans.
2. Expanding Medicaid coverage to all children regardless of their legal status, Immigrant Children Health Improvement Act (ICHIA), to health care resources for the health security and well-being of Texas.

B. Improve access to health care services by:

3. Insuring more efficiency in private and public enrollment system particularly in the area of staff and computer systems.
4. Developing incentives that will stimulate Primary Care Physicians and some specialty doctors to under served areas.

C. Improve access to “medical home” by:

- Creating access to a “medical home or wellness center” versus the ER for continuity of care. Increase funding incentives and support for preventive services and primary care for health delivery services and Community Health Centers (CHCs).

D. Reauthorize and expand State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) which will provide health care coverage needed to the most vulnerable, regardless of legal status.

Policy Priority 1a: *If consumers are taking on more responsibilities for their health care, they deserve as well, the consumer protections to handle these responsibilities. In Texas, the insurance regulatory process is nestled in the Texas Department of Insurance (TDI) that to date does not include regulatory oversight of health insurance companies. The sunset review process of TDI must be a tool to building a comprehensive health care coverage for Texans by protecting health care consumer by monitoring rate of health insurance premiums and more effectively enhance the utilization of the Texas Health Reinsurance System- the volunteer reinsurance pool for small business as Texas .*

Issue 2: The U.S.-Mexico Border’s population growth, demography, bilingual/bi-cultural, and bi-national economies, and intergenerational migration characteristics uniquely challenge the ability of Border CHCs to *increase access to comprehensive primary health care.*

Policy Priority 2: *The U.S./Mexico Border must be designated as a “Empowerment Improvement Zone” that recognizes the exacerbated disparities and inequalities in both health resources, and health problems and risks. The Empowerment Improvement Zone designation must include specific public and private funding opportunities to address public health, health promotion and prevention, clinical preventive and chronic care management, health professional shortages, and health facility needs.*

Issue 3 – Severe Shortages of Health Care Professionals: Border CHCs have acute health care provider staffing needs, particularly for bilingual bicultural health professionals. With 116 of 246 Texas counties plagued by a severe shortage of health professionals among primary care and specialist disciplines.

Policy Priority 3: *Increase health professionals who practice at the border by increasing funding to: loan repayment for health practitioners who practice in health shortage border areas; health professional training institutes along the border and; federal programs that service and assist underrepresented students into health professional programs i.e. restore Health Careers Opportunity Programs (HCOP).*

Issue 4 – Prioritize Women and Families: The bienestar of our communities are rooted in the health and well-being of women. The issue of Latina bienestar is interdependent on access to and accessibility of culturally appropriate choices and opportunities for their reproductive health, medical and gynecological homes, affordable health care and improved socio-economic conditions such as living wages, quality education, and housing. But when Texan women with children are more likely to live below poverty, be uninsured and the primary caregiver for the family it is time to rethink our priorities.

Policy Priority 4: *Federal and State governments need to develop policies that enhance not create barriers for women to have access to key health services such as*

- A. Expanding Medicaid coverage to more Adults*
- B. Increase effectiveness of Women Health Program by improving enrollment outreach to uninsured women, regardless of legal status, into the program.*
- C. Improving transition of postpartum to WHP by streamlining the process for new mothers on Medicaid, after their 60 days termination, access to healthcare service through WHP.*
- D. Expand WHP to include teen mothers*
- E. Reduce unintended pregnancy*

Issue 5 – Immigration: Historically, immigration policy has mirrored political and economic trends. But under a 9/11 context, our broken immigration policy is being shaped by national security. As a result, local governments have taken to fragmented policies that purport legislative and program solutions to address immigration but in fact are anti-immigrant rather than objective policy solutions. Such policies hurt not help communities.

Policy Priority 5: *A bi-partisan effort for real Comprehensive Immigration Reform that includes: A path to legislation which includes a legal means for family unification and reduces immigration backlog; Support more comprehensive bi-national economic development policy with Mexico that benefit both countries; and Reframe border security dialogue to reflect the Health Security of Texas and our communities. Increased border security funding does little to address the growing insecurity along the border. For example, the creation of a 700 mile long fence will not increase security along the border but harm the sustainability and delivery of health care resources that is already limited.*