



Undocumented Immigrants in Health Care Roles and Settings

By Nicole Prchal Svajlenka February 2, 2021

Across the country, 5 million undocumented immigrants are working alongside their neighbors to keep the country safe amid a global pandemic—including 346,000 who are working either as health care providers or in other roles necessary to keep hospitals, physicians' offices, and labs running smoothly.¹

Throughout this pandemic, health care providers have been universally recognized as front line heroes. Day in and day out, stretched to or even beyond capacity, these individuals are risking their own health and safety to treat COVID-19 patients and otherwise keep Americans healthy. But no less important are the facility staff, without whom places such as hospitals and nursing homes would not be operational. These individuals are cleaning COVID-19 patients' rooms and serving them meals, facing the same exposure risks as nurses, technicians, and aides.

TABLE 1
Largest occupations for undocumented workers in the health care industry

Title	Number of undocumented workers
Health care practitioners and support occupations	236,300
Personal care aides	56,100
Nursing assistants	48,700
Home health aides	34,200
Medical assistants	13,500
Dental assistants	10,400
Licensed practical and licensed vocational nurses	9,700
Massage therapists	6,800
Registered nurses	5,600
Physical therapists	5,100
Clinical laboratory technologists and technicians	4,700
Other workers in a health care setting	109,900
Maids and housekeeping cleaners	14,800
Receptionists and information clerks	12,300
Medical and health services managers	6,300
Janitors and building cleaners	6,300
Cooks	4,400

Source: Center for American Progress analysis of pooled 2018 and 2019 1-year American Community Survey microdata, accessed via Steven Ruggles and others, "Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, U.S. Census Data for Social, Economic, and Health Research, 2016, 2017, and 2018 and 2019 American Community Surveys: 1-year estimates" (Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2020), available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa/>.

Slightly more than two-thirds of the 346,000 undocumented health care workers serve as health care providers or in supporting roles, while the remaining are working in administrative or custodial roles in a health care facility.

Family members

- Undocumented immigrants working as health care providers or in health care settings are family to 103,000 undocumented spouses and minor children. Extending protections to these individuals is necessary to maintain family unity and ensure that they can do this important work without fear and uncertainty surrounding their loved ones.

Economic and fiscal contributions

- Each year, these undocumented workers and their households pay \$5.1 billion in federal tax contributions and \$2.6 billion in state and local taxes. These households hold \$19.4 billion in spending power.
- These workers' employers annually contribute payroll taxes totaling \$1 billion to buoy Social Security and Medicare.
- Undocumented immigrants working in this sector own 128,000 homes, paying \$2 billion in mortgage payments and \$3.4 billion in rental payments annually.

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For state-level data on the family members and economic contributions of undocumented workers by sector, please see [“Protecting Undocumented Workers on the Pandemic’s Front Lines: A Look at Certain Sectors.”](#)²

Endnotes

1 Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, “Protecting Undocumented Workers on the Pandemic’s Front Lines: Immigrants Are Essential to America’s Recovery” (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2020), available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/immigration/reports/2020/12/02/493307/protecting-undocumented-workers-pandemics-front-lines/>. Estimates presented in this fact sheet are based on CAP analysis of pooled 2018 and 2019 1-year American Community Survey microdata, accessed via Steven Ruggles and others, “Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, U.S. Census Data for Social, Economic, and Health Research, 2018 and 2019 American Community Surveys: 1-year estimates” (Minneapolis: Minnesota Population Center, 2020), available at <https://usa.ipums.org/usa>. See CAP report for occupation and industry codes. Previous CAP analysis was based on the North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) “Health Care and Social Assistance” category. In this analysis, it is refined to include the ambulatory health care services, hospitals, and nursing and residential care facilities but not the social assistance industry—a difference of approximately 78,000 more workers.

2 Nicole Prchal Svajlenka, “Protecting Undocumented Workers on the Pandemic’s Front Lines: A Look at Certain Sectors,” Center for American Progress, February 2, 2021, available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/?p=495017>. For downloadable state-level data on undocumented workers in health care roles and settings, see Center for American Progress, “State-level data on undocumented workers in health-related industries and occupations,” available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/content/uploads/2021/01/29060906/StateData-Health.xlsx> (last accessed February 2021).