



## **Study: Immigrant families in U.S. avoiding food stamps and other safety net programs**

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Immigrant families, including U.S. citizens, are avoiding certain safety net programs because of a “chilling effect” tied to a controversial proposal to tighten the country’s standards for granting green cards and temporary visas, according to a report released Wednesday by the Urban Institute.

Researchers at the Washington, D.C.-based think tank surveyed nearly 2,000 adult immigrants in December 2018 about the Trump administration’s push to expand “public charge” rules to include noncash public benefits, including Medicaid, subsidized housing, and food stamps.

They found 13.7% of adults — or a family member — did not participate in one of those programs because federal immigration authorities may count them as “negative factors” during the application process.

The figure jumps to 20.7% among low-income immigrant families.

“What’s worrisome about it is that it’s discouraging folks from participating in programs for which they’re eligible, for which their children are eligible because they’re worried it might impact their green cards or other immigration issues in the future,” said Hamutal Bernstein, a senior researcher at the Urban Institute.

Nearly half of those surveyed reported that someone in their family dropped or did not apply for benefits through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, commonly referred to as food stamps.

Medicaid or CHIP was a close second.

David Bier, an immigration policy analyst at the libertarian CATO Institute, doesn’t question that immigrant families aren’t enrolling in public benefits out of fear. But he thinks the study’s results are likely inaccurate.

“Really what you’re picking up with surveys of this type is this general chilling effect that’s ongoing, that has multiple factors,” said Bier. “There’s a general feeling among immigrant families about avoiding contact with government agencies.”

That’s especially true with it comes to agencies overseeing welfare programs, said Bier.

For now, the country’s “public charge” standard, which speaks to whether an immigrant is likely to become a burden to taxpayers, only considers participation in cash-assistance programs, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Supplemental Security Income.

If adopted, the standard would include Medicaid, CHIP, SNAP, and housing subsidies, including Section 8 housing vouchers.

Under the proposal, asylum seekers and refugees would be exempt.

The Trump administration has said the changes will promote self-sufficiency and protect “finite resources.”

The government is expected to implement a final version of the new regulations this year.