



## **The economic impact of losing DACA workers**

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For 24-year-old Nicolas Ugaz-Valencia, every work day is living the American dream. He is a manager for a home health care service in New York City, using his Spanish language skills to help people in need. Back in 2001, Nicolas and his family left their home country of Peru in pursuit of creating a new life in the United States of America.

"My parents gave up completely everything, my mom had left all her family behind for us to have a life here and I am forever grateful of that," said Ugaz-Valencia.

For years, Nicolas and his family lived in the shadows, because they lacked legal status to be in the U.S. That got in the way of opportunities that most Americans take for granted such as going to college and pursuing a career.

"The biggest challenge with higher education was the finances — and going to college is super expensive here. As an undocumented person you cannot get state funding, loans, in-state tuition. You either pay out of pocket or you get a scholarship, those are really the only options," said Ugaz-Valencia.

That all began to change in 2012, when then-President Barack Obama signed an executive order creating "Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals" or "DACA." The program offers immigrants who arrived in the U.S. as children legal waivers allowing them to stay and work in the country.

DACA recipients must undergo background checks and are required to renew their waivers every two years. Since its inception, roughly 700,000 applicants known as "Dreamers" have been approved for the program, including Nicolas and his two brothers.

"Without DACA I can't work, without DACA I can't walk the streets safe thinking I'm not going to get deported," said Ugaz-Valencia. "Knowing that it was going to be disbanded I was terrified every single day."

Last fall, President Donald Trump said he would phase out the DACA program and ordered March 5th as the deadline to end it. But, a federal appeals court order has rendered that date meaningless. So, current enrollees can continue to renew their DACA status while the court decides whether the suspension can proceed. If it rules in favor of the administration, hundreds of thousands of "Dreamers" could be subject to deportation.

“If you keep the DACA recipients in the United States and you allow them to legally work and live here, not only is that going to be a boom for the economy that is, they're going to earn more money and they're going to pay more taxes. But it's also going to grow the broader economy,” said Ike Brannon, Senior Fellow at the CATO Institute.

Ike Brannon, a senior fellow at the CATO Institute, a libertarian think-tank in Washington D.C has studied the impact of DACA recipients on the U.S. economy. He recently co-authored a new report that forecasts the cost of reversing DACA.

"We expect in the next 10 years if we allow the DACA recipients to remain in the United States, that would add an extra \$350 billion to the economy compared to excluding them from being able to work legally. And we also estimate that that would result in an additional \$90 billion of tax revenue, just for the federal government," said Brannon.

Nicolas's employer, Cocoon Homecare, contacted an immigration attorney to see if it could protect him if and when DACA ends. The company was told there was nothing that could be done. Cocoon said not having Nicolas as part of the team would be a huge loss, because he is good at connecting with patients.

So, as DACA recipients await their fate, Nicolas says he has no choice but to carry on.

"You have to be very resilient as an immigrant, because in the midst of all this adversity, you have to stand tall and really keep on fighting, because that is what we have been doing since we came to this country. We have to fight and continue to have dreams," said Ugaz-Valencia.