



The California Tuberculosis Controllers Association (CTCA) is an organization that is passionate about protecting the health of all communities from tuberculosis (TB). The CTCA strongly opposes changes being considered for federal immigration rules that expand conditions for denial of legal permanent residency in the U.S. These rule changes would negatively impact U.S. populations most at risk for TB. TB is an airborne disease, that, if not properly treated, can spread from person to person within households, churches, workplaces, and other community settings. Appropriate and timely treatment is the only effective way to prevent TB disease from spreading among communities.

“Health-seeking behaviors are an essential component to the prevention and elimination of TB through the timely diagnosis and treatment of latent TB infection and TB disease. Individuals with untreated latent TB infection may eventually progress to TB disease. The prevention and treatment of TB disease is imperative to the health of the community as TB can be spread to others through the air.” Due to fear of legal consequences, individuals may choose not to seek medical care, thereby missing opportunities to be diagnosed and treated for latent TB infection, and thus remain at risk for becoming sick with TB disease. Individuals with TB disease may delay evaluation, and thus may spread TB to others in their community and beyond.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Report on TB in the United States 2017 data, the percentage of cases occurring in non-U.S. born persons was 70%. California data from the 2016 -2020 California TB Elimination Plan states 80% of persons with TB disease are non-U.S. born. Identifying and treating TB in these populations would be even more challenging if they chose not to seek medical care for fear it might jeopardize their opportunity to become a U.S. permanent resident.

The proposed regulation changes will also result in people with TB infection and disease delaying care due to fear of how it may affect their opportunity to become a U.S. resident. These delays will greatly impact the health of individuals and communities as the transmission of TB increases resulting in more people getting sick thereby increasing healthcare costs and potential TB related deaths.. This also affects already strapped local health departments who will have to expend more resources to bring TB outbreaks under control.

CTCA is adamantly against this proposed federal regulation change for the following reasons:

- Recipients of Medicaid/Medi-Cal and public assistance programs for housing and food services who are non-U.S. born have the highest risk for TB. Prevention of TB and access to health and nutrition benefits matter to the overall health and well-being of an entire community.
- Deterring people at risk for TB from accessing healthcare and social services will result in more TB disease in the community.

- The proposed rule undermines the ability of public health departments to control the spread of TB, a preventable, curable disease, which, if left unchecked, can be devastating and costly to a community.

A Kaiser Family Foundation report, dated October 11, 2018, advises that nearly all (94%) noncitizens who entered the U.S. without legal permanent resident status would have at least one characteristic that the Department of Homeland Security could potentially weigh negatively in a public charge determination under the proposed rule. [Estimated Impacts of the Proposed Public Charge Rule on Immigrants and Medicaid. Kaiser Family Foundation October 2018 Issue Brief. <https://www.kff.org/disparities-policy/issue-brief/estimated-impacts-of-the-proposed-public-charge-rule-on-immigrants-and-medicaid/>]

A study conducted in Los Angeles found that immigration concerns resulted in delays in seeking care for TB symptoms. Non-English speaking immigrants cited fear of immigration consequences as their main reason for avoiding seeking care. Delayed care for individuals with TB results in increased spread of the disease to others. Delays in diagnosis also worsen the course of disease and increase the rate of death due to TB. [Asch S, Leake B, Andersen R, Gelberg L. Why do symptomatic patients delay obtaining care for tuberculosis? Am J Respir Crit Care Med 1998; 157 (4 Pt 1): 1244-1248.]

A state of Maryland study published in 2005 found that non-English speaking immigrants with delayed treatment cited fear of being reported to immigration authorities as their main reason for avoiding seeking care. [Golub J E, Bur S, Cronin W A, et al. Patient and health care system delays in pulmonary tuberculosis diagnosis in a low-incidence state. Int J Tuberc Lung Dis 2005; 9(9): 992-998]

Changes being proposed will likely result in persons at risk for TB not being tested for latent TB infection, delaying testing for TB disease, and delaying treatment. These delays will have a huge impact on communities, increasing the number of people who get sick and increasing the resources needed for public health departments to control TB in our communities.

CTCA works to eliminate the threat of TB in California, and we are committed to promoting health equity and advocating for the well-being of all communities. Early detection and treatment of TB disease is vital for the prevention and control of TB for both the individual and the community. The success of TB prevention and control is dependent upon at-risk populations accessing health care services and ensuring that all members of our community are not dissuaded from seeking health care by policies that threaten their ability to stay in the U.S. as a legal permanent resident should they utilize available resources for health coverage.

Sincerely,

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