

STRENGTHENING BORDER FAMILIES

Community and Policy Responses to Serving Immigrant Families with Young Children in Doña Ana County, NM



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DATA HIGHLIGHTS

Three key themes emerged from interviews with local community agency leaders and city and county government representatives around (1) barriers to service receipt, (2) immigrant family needs, and (3) local responses to meet the needs of immigrant families.

BARRIERS TO SERVICE RECEIPT

Common barriers preventing or hindering immigrant families from accessing needed services include:

- **Fear** due to anti-immigrant rhetoric & policy
- Lack of **eligibility** for government programs
- **Language** barriers & lack of bilingual resources
- Lack of **information** and misinformation about available services
- Lack of **funding** and funding restrictions on serving immigrants
- **Policy** barriers (e.g., public charge rule)
- Reluctance and **mistrust** of government agencies
- **Bias** among government employees
- **Siloed** service structure
- Unique **border** area barriers
- Government office **closures**
- **COVID** safety issues

BACKGROUND

This brief highlights the findings and recommendations from a community-based participatory research study conducted in Doña Ana County, New Mexico during the latter half of 2020. Through interviews with community organization leaders, local government representatives, and state government representatives, researchers aimed to gain insight into the accessibility and quality of community services for immigrant families with young children; identify barriers and facilitators to service access; and develop community-based policy and practice solutions to improve supports to this population.

IMMIGRANT FAMILY NEEDS

Another key finding was that the COVID-19 has largely spotlighted or exacerbated existing needs among immigrant families with respect to:

- **Education** and **technology** access, especially in rural areas.
- Specialized **health** and **mental health** services (e.g., Spanish speaking mental health counselors and therapists that specialize in migrant trauma).
- **Language** services.
- **Legal** services and support obtaining identification and other legal documents.
- **Transportation**.
- **Income, food, mortgage** and **rental** assistance.
- **Workplace safety** protections, particularly for essential agricultural workers.
- **Childcare** for immigrant families, especially those that do not qualify for federally funded childcare and who lost childcare during the pandemic.

“

I think what one of the big questions for me is wondering like how much the pandemic has exacerbated the already existing issues, you know? Fear of being deported, fear of losing work,...and so many people have lost work during this time or became unemployed. So, I think that's a big issue.

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LOCAL RESPONSES

Despite the unique needs and barriers impacting immigrant families in southern NM, communities have responded with innovative approaches to address their needs.

- **Implementation of inclusive policies.** Both local government and community organizations have implemented policies to promote inclusivity of immigrant and mixed-status families, e.g., by preventing local government entities from acting in immigration enforcement capacities and by adjusting documentation requirements for service receipt.
- **Circumvention of funding restrictions.** Local government and community organizations have responded to restrictions in federal funding sources by leveraging local funding and private donors to be able to serve all families regardless of immigration status.
- **Utilization of advocacy and community organizing.** Immigrant-serving organizations have used community organizing and advocacy to address inequalities facing immigrant and mixed-status families on various issues.

NM EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE DEPARTMENT (ECECD)



Researchers also interviewed representatives from the ECECD, who revealed some unique challenges and responses to immigrant families' needs at the state level.

NEEDS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Better understand community barriers to accessing public services.
- Help immigrant families understand what services they do qualify for.
- Address biases against immigrants that exist within state agencies.
- Ensure that any future policy offering financial assistance and Medicaid is inclusive of all immigrants, including undocumented children.

EXISTING SUPPORTIVE INITIATIVES

- Availability of economic stimulus funds for early childhood programs to anyone residing in NM, including immigrants.
- Expansion of the number of families eligible for childcare subsidies, including clarification that parent citizenship and residency status does not disqualify eligible children.
- Licensure of temporary, home-based childcare sites during COVID to provide state support to friend and family childcare providers.
- Resource linkage and program navigation assistance to connect families with other needed kinds of assistance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

STATE GOVERNMENT SOLUTIONS

Recommendations for state government to improve service delivery to immigrant families include:

- **Ensure language access** via comprehensive language access plans for state government providers and contractors.
- **Establish a statewide Immigrant Resource Coordinator** to create centralized resource and referral source for immigrants.
- **Appoint a Local Equity Access Coordinator** to work with state systems and agencies on compliance with equity access requirements.
- **Improve data measures** to more adequately capture equity-related issues and immigrant family needs.
- **Prioritize targeted outreach and education** on federal policy that impacts immigrant families (e.g., the public charge rule, sensitive locations, and the American Rescue Plan).
- **Revise benefits policy** to advertise childcare subsidies to all children in NM and extend state licensing for family, friend, and neighbor (FFN) care.
- **Leverage funding**, e.g., COVID recovery funds toward development of equity initiatives for immigrant families.

COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS

ONE-STOP SERVICE SHOP

A key recommendation from local government and agency representatives centered around the need for a centralized one-stop-shop for services for immigrant families in Doña Ana County, with the following features:

- Both a physical and an online presence.
- Developed by a consortium of providers and run by a local trusted agency.
- Regularly updated referral network and service directory.
- Funded by a philanthropic entity or by the state.
- A central location, a spoked model, or a mobile unit to address transportation barriers.
- Clearly defined by families.

INCLUDING IMMIGRANTS IN COVID RECOVERY

To meet immigrant needs in COVID recovery efforts, local government and community agency leaders recommended an emphasis on:

- Inclusion in economic recovery.
- Expanded eligibility.
- Healthcare access.
- Mental health services access.
- Technology access and infrastructure.

STRATEGIES FOR TAILORING OUTREACH & PROGRAMMING TO IMMIGRANTS

- **Contract with trusted** immigrant-serving organizations and community partners to conduct outreach as effective, trusted messengers.
- Initial outreach and promotion of state benefits and services could be conducted at **churches**.
- Some communities find that going **door-to-door** after a program has been introduced in a local church is a successful engagement strategy. A service, once accepted by a family, should begin with a home visit.
- **Consistency** and **familiarity** are critical—the same people going to churches should be the same ones going to homes.
- Include **information/fact sheets** on public charge in home visits, schools, health services, public assistance offices.
- Target **parent engagement programs** for immigrant families.
- Utilize **local school districts** and **head start programs** to reach parents of 3–4-year-olds.

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