



**Testimony of the New York Immigration Coalition
Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2022 Executive Budget Proposal: Health/Medicaid**

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February 8, 2022

Hello. My name is Murad Awawdeh and I'm the Executive Director at the New York Immigration Coalition, an umbrella policy and advocacy organization that works statewide with over 200 immigrant-serving member organizations. We are a co-lead of the Coverage4All campaign, a statewide effort of more than 140 organizations to expand coverage to the hundreds of thousands of undocumented New Yorkers who the state refuses to acknowledge in its health coverage even as it leans on them to help New York pull through the worst pandemic in recent history. Thank you to Chair Rivera and Chair Gottfried and the members of the Senate & Assembly Health Committees for convening this important hearing and allowing us the opportunity to submit testimony on the importance of prioritizing immigrant health, particularly Coverage 4 All in this year's budget.

We have been fighting for more than six years at the NYIC and through the #Coverage4All campaign for the state to make undocumented adults eligible for coverage. But the calculus has changed during the past two years, making the urgency greater than ever. As we continue to fight recurring COVID-19 surges we are reminded of the disparate impact of the pandemic on communities of color. Among these are the immigrant New Yorkers who represent 54% of the state's entire "essential" workforce, subjected to greater exposure to COVID in order to feed families - their own and others - and keep New York running. And yet 154,000 undocumented New Yorkers continue to suffer the indignity of a discriminatory health insurance system that prohibits them from obtaining full coverage.

The state took an important first step two years ago, early in the pandemic - at the prodding of the Coverage4All campaign, Assemblymember Gottfried, and Senator Rivera - by covering COVID-19 testing, evaluation, and treatment under Emergency Medicaid, for which low-income undocumented New Yorkers are eligible. But this limited coverage is insufficient. The recovery from COVID-19 is often long and arduous, with recurring symptoms and need for rehabilitative therapies. Emergency Medicaid does not cover this care, and New Yorkers are suffering as a result.¹ An urgent solution is to extend full coverage through the state's Essential Plan to any income-eligible undocumented New Yorker.

We couldn't have predicted a pandemic, but had Coverage4All been implemented, we would have saved thousands of lives that were lost because they lacked health insurance coverage. Our state leadership has blood on their hands because these individuals would be alive today had our state leadership made the right decision. We must right this wrong by providing coverage to help the tens of thousands of people who have suffered the worst of the pandemic and are unable to get help in their recovery. The cost of this coverage would be \$345 million to create a state-funded Essential Plan for ALL New Yorkers up to 200% of the federal poverty level who are currently excluded because of their immigration status. We estimate that 46,000 of them would enroll annually when the program is fully implemented.

¹<https://newrepublic.com/article/159550/covid-symptoms-outlast-insurance>

New York is shamefully trailing behind other states—including California, Minnesota and Illinois — who have established state-only funded programs for certain groups of immigrants, such as young people and older people. This proposal is represented in Assembly Bill A880A and Senate Bill S1572A. The Legislature should pass this bill along with a commensurate budget allocation immediately.

Governor Hochul's failure to include health coverage for immigrant New Yorkers in her first budget as Governor is not only short-sighted, it is literally a death sentence for many immigrants New Yorkers, many of whom are serving as the first line of defense in our State's ongoing battle against COVID-19. The budget adds insult to injury in noting that the state has saved \$1.5 billion by shifting lawfully present immigrants from state-funded Medicaid to the mostly federally-funded Essential Plan. In many cases these are the family members of the 154,000 undocumented New Yorkers who remain excluded from the system. This \$1.5 billion in savings should be reinvested in the same communities the savings came out of to provide Essential Plan eligibility to people who are currently ineligible. We hear all the time that the price tag of Coverage4All is too great. But it isn't funding that is lacking - it is the Governor's and Legislature's priorities and courage that are lacking. I ask each of you. How much money would you spend to save the life of someone you love?

Achieving Essential Plan coverage for these immigrants excluded patients will make an enormous difference in their health and ability to support themselves and their families. It will also help support the health care providers who care for them. Many of these immigrants are eligible for "emergency Medicaid," but that coverage is limited to emergency care and does not cover primary care and other non-emergency services.

The past three years have taught us that this pandemic is unpredictable. We don't know if there will be another variant or another pandemic, but we will save lives by protecting the most vulnerable which are the undocumented people. Governor Hochul and our Legislature must pass #Coverage4All now—too many of our community members have already paid the price for our leadership's inaction (A880A/S1572A).

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. For any follow-up, please contact Murad Awawdeh mAwawdeh@nyic.org

²https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/98805/2001925_state_based_individual_mandates_2.pdf