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Contact: Catherine Direen, 415/595-7050
cdireen@familydocs.org

Family Physicians Oppose Proposed Rule Aimed at Decreasing Immigrants' Use of Health Care Services

CAFP launches campaign to raise awareness among family physicians of the effects of proposed federal immigration policy changes on patients

San Francisco – The 10,000-member California Academy of Family Physicians (CAFP) opposes a draft federal rule¹ that would make it more likely that lawfully present immigrants could be denied green cards or U.S. visas – or even be deported – because they sought needed health care services.

On September 22, the Trump Administration proposed a change to immigration policy that would overhaul how the government evaluates whether an immigrant is “likely to be a public charge,” that is, someone who would use publicly funded benefits in the U.S.

“Patients in California would be especially hard-hit by the proposed changes,” said CAFP President Lisa Ward, MD, MScPH, MS. “The proposal has already made immigrant families afraid to seek health services that support their basic needs.”

“California has the highest number of foreign-born residents of any state,” she said. “Most immigrants are documented and living here legally. Half of the children in our state live with at least one foreign-born parent, and most of these children are native-born U.S. citizens.”

“Family physicians treat immigrants every day,” Dr. Ward said. “Disease and illness do not discriminate based on immigration status. Maintaining access to health care for immigrants will keep all Californians safer and healthier. It’s inhumane to try to deter immigrants from using health care and other programs for which they qualify.”

“CAFP is deeply concerned about the proposed ‘public charge’ rule,” she said. “For that reason, the CAFP Foundation is collaborating with other medical associations and societies in the state to launch an information and awareness campaign, funded by the California Health Care Foundation, to help physicians understand their own and their patients’ rights and responsibilities around immigration. The CAFP Foundation will produce a range of guidance materials for family physicians.”

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¹ <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2018/09/22/dhs-announces-new-proposed-immigration-rule-enforce-long-standing-law-promotes-self>

CAFP's Principles of Health Policy:

CAFP believes communities are safer and healthier when all individuals, regardless of immigration status, have access to health care. It is CAFP policy that health care is a human right and every person has a right to comprehensive, high-quality health services delivered in a timely, culturally competent and economically sustainable manner, regardless of their age, gender identity, sexual orientation, geographic location, income, health status or immigration status.

CAFP Campaign

Throughout the remainder of 2018 and into 2019, the CAFP Foundation will conduct an information and awareness campaign, funded by the California Health Care Foundation. The goal is to make physicians aware of how the proposed rule, and possible future policy changes, would affect patients, physicians and the public and to make family physicians aware of their rights and responsibilities relative to federal immigration policy.

The campaign will include live events, media outreach, position papers, patient education materials, webinars, and a web-based resource center for California physicians.

CAFP will collaborate on the campaign with the Alameda Contra Costa Medical Association, San Francisco Marin Medical Society, American Academy of Pediatrics-California, Osteopathic Physicians and Surgeons of California and Sonoma County Medical Society.

About the California Academy of Family Physicians: *With more than 10,000 members, including active practicing family physicians, residents in family medicine, and medical students interested in the specialty, CAFP is the largest primary care medical society in California. Family physicians are trained to treat an entire family's medical needs, addressing the whole spectrum of life's medical challenges. FPs serve a broad base of patients in urban, suburban and rural areas, often in California's most underserved areas.*