

Undocumented Immigrants' Health Care Utilization in Los Angeles County

Abstract:

Our current understanding of undocumented immigrants' health care utilization and medical needs relies on self-reported health status in surveys and capture health care utilization when individuals are relatively healthy. What is unknown, however, is the health status of undocumented immigrants when they reach the point of needing intensive medical care and their health needs when they are in close contact with the health care system. This talk will uncover patterns of undocumented patients' utilization in Los Angeles: home to the largest county population of undocumented immigrants and one of the largest public hospital systems in the country. I will present findings from inpatient hospitalizations pre-COVID as well as Emergency Department encounters during the early part of the COVID pandemic from the Los Angeles Department of Health Services. While existing work suggests that undocumented immigrants could have more severe health care needs on account of their poorer access to medical care, we did not see clear worse hospitalization outcomes among undocumented immigrants, especially younger patients. Undocumented immigrants also appeared to have higher COVID-related ED care, although their general ED care dropped precipitously during the early part of the pandemic. The talk will also touch on implications of these findings to our broader understanding of the immigrant health literature in demography and public health.