

## **Public Charge: Essential Information for Pediatric Providers**

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### **Understanding the Impact on Our Patients**

Many immigrant families in our community avoid seeking essential healthcare and nutrition services due to misconceptions about the Public Charge rule. This fear can significantly impact children's health outcomes, making it crucial for pediatric providers to understand and address these concerns.

### **What is Public Charge?**

The Public Charge rule applies only when certain individuals apply for lawful permanent residence (green card) or specific temporary visas. Immigration officials assess whether an applicant might depend on government assistance, considering only two types of benefits:

1. **Cash assistance programs** (CalWORKS, SSI, General Assistance)
2. **Long-term institutionalization** at government expense (skilled nursing facilities)

### **Critical Points for Patient Care**

#### **Most benefits are SAFE to use:**

- Medi-Cal and other healthcare services
- WIC and CalFresh (food assistance)
- Head Start and childcare assistance
- School lunch programs
- Housing assistance (Section 8)
- Educational support and tax credits

#### **Family member protections:**

- Only the applicant's benefit use matters—not their family members
- A parent applying for status won't be penalized if their U.S. citizen child receives benefits

#### **Many immigrants are exempt:**

- Green card holders applying for renewal or citizenship
- Refugees, asylees, and special immigrant juveniles
- Victims of trafficking or domestic violence

## Current Status

The Biden Public Charge rule (effective December 23, 2022) remains in effect as of June 2025. While policy changes are possible, any modifications must follow formal rule-making processes.

## Clinical Guidance

When families express concerns about using benefits:

- Reassure them that healthcare services like Medi-Cal are safe to use
- Emphasize that children's benefit use doesn't affect parents' immigration cases
- Direct them to approved resources for detailed information
- Consider involving social work or legal partnerships when needed
- Understanding Public Charge helps us ensure that fear doesn't prevent children from receiving the healthcare and nutrition services essential for healthy development.

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