



## Model Messages Regarding Proposed Public Charge Rule Changes

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### **Background:**

Over last few years, BARHII Members asked for assistance on communications and messaging. Through a partnership with Berkley Media Studies Group (BMSG) we provided several trainings on communications for health equity work to our Members. As part of ongoing support, we were asked to share welcoming messages and communication for immigrant clients from amongst our group. Most recently, BMSG helped us create model messages to combat proposed public charge rule changes.

All the messages proposed in this document follow BMSG's 3 key components of message strategy: Problem Statement (What's wrong?), Policy Objective (What should be done?), Values Dimension (What does it mean?).

### **Where did these model messages come from?**

On August 17, 2018 at the BARHII General Meeting, local health departments shared what they have done or plan to do in response to anticipated changes to the public charge test. With 9 out of 11 counties represented, the discussion included emphasis on raising the level of urgency, while at the same time, avoiding raising fear among those who use health department services.

It became clear that to protect the health and safety of our immigrant communities, we needed to develop multiple public health responses that our departments could quickly adopt, adapt, and use once public charge rule changes were published. Listed below are template communication messages for LHDs to consider. These incorporate communication research and best practices as well as messaging from immigrant rights coalitions, such as Protecting Immigrant Families.

### **What is public charge?**

"Public Charge" is a test used by US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to decide who they will let into the U.S., who can renew certain temporary visas, and who can get Lawful Permanent Residency (LPR)—also known as green card. Public charge is a test for the use of public programs and benefits. There is no public charge test when you apply for naturalization.

The proposed changes of the public charge test will intensify a climate that is already harming the health of immigrants, putting millions at risk. Public health departments are combating this proposed change because it will undermine the health, safety, trust, and wellness of our communities. Fear of accessing public health services will create a sicker, hungrier, and poorer nation.

PLEASE NOTE: As of 9/23, the Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) has not been published in the Federal Register for comment. This statement is in response to the press release and rule text issued by the Department of Homeland Security on the evening of Saturday, 9/22. The press release

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

## Model Messages for Three Audiences

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### **Message to LHD Staff**

We value everyone in our County. This is a core principle in ensuring everyone access to health services. When people fear going to the doctor and enrolling public benefits, this becomes critically important for their own health and the wellbeing of our community. We are asking all staff within our County to communicate to all clients, including our immigrant clients, that they are vital, we care about them, and they are still eligible for important public benefits that support their health and the overall health of our county and state.

We encourage all LHD staff to review guidance given to staff on how to communicate welcoming messages: <http://barhii.org/immigration/>

### **Message to Community Members**

In our County, we know that collaboration among all our community members is necessary to achieve prosperity and solidarity. When people don't feel safe to go to the doctor or get public benefits, we aren't able to thrive individually or collectively. We want everyone who lives here to maintain their health and take care of each other by continuing to seek the care and support their needs. Our County Health Department will always be here for our community and remains committed to providing excellent services with respect and dignity for all.

### **Message to Board of Supervisors**

#### *Option 1: Everyone Thrives*

In our County, we want everyone to thrive. The proposed Public Charge change has already undermined community cohesion by creating fear and toxic stress. We can be at the forefront of resilience and safety. We, as the County, should weigh in how this impacts all of us. This proposed change would make using health, anti-hunger, anti-poverty, or affordable housing programs a possible disqualifier for immigration. Even a family member's use of those programs might be used against immigrants, putting millions of families at risk. The result: a sicker, hungrier, poorer nation. That's why we want you, Board of Supervisors, to participate in public comment and advocate at the California State Association of Counties.

#### *Option 2: Historical Perspective*

In our County, we want everyone to thrive and be healthy. And we know right now that the federal government is looking at changing regulations around the Public Charge test. These changes would make it more difficult for immigrants to have roadmaps to citizenship and could be detrimental to the health of our whole community.

The Public Charge Test was first developed in 1882, the same year the racist Chinese Exclusion Act was created and later used to prevent Jewish refugees fleeing Nazi Germany from entering the U.S. Historically, it also has been used to prevent people with disabilities, LGBTQ immigrants, and unmarried women from entering the U.S. Proposed changes to the Public Charge test are to count enrollment in food stamps/SNAP benefits, Medi-Cal, and social services that help create thriving

and healthy communities, against our neighbors, friends, family, and co-workers citizenship applications. If the proposed changes to the Public Charge test pass, many immigrants and their families will disenroll from critical social services and benefits that are vital to ensuring our communities are safe, healthy, and productive. For example, people who are afraid to use needed services may forego preventive health services, and only seek care in the emergency room when they are very sick, which diminishes quality of life and is very expensive for the County. As enrollment in critical programs erodes along with the revenue that supports these programs, it could create a ripple effect, creating layoffs and job instability for many of our residents.

*Option 3: All in this Together*

Whether we're tenth generation American or a newcomer, Black, White, or Brown, most of us try to treat people how we'd want to be treated. New immigrants work hard to make life better for themselves and who come here to bring new ideas and new energy to our nation. When we have each other's backs – by ensuring those of us who've fallen on hard times can get support to see to better days – we make things better for all of us.

Our County and our staff have demonstrated that we are a collaborative and inclusive county dedicated to ensuring all our residents have the services they need to be healthy, safe, and live with dignity. We have XX immigrants in our County. They are our neighbors, teachers, friends, coworkers, and family. The negative impacts of this proposed expanded rule on our County would be extensive and harm all of us. Our County should have a clear statement of opposition to the expansion of the Public Charge test, and a coordinated outreach strategy to ensure our clients and residents understand the issue and can continue to receive the services and benefits they need to live healthy lives.