

Essential but excluded: Farmworkers face healthcare hurdles



IN THIS EPISODE

Undocumented workers in California contribute about [\\$3.7 billion](#) in state and local taxes each year. They hold one in 16 jobs in the state. What challenges do they face when it comes to getting access to quality health care? How is this impacting their health and our communities? To find out, we spoke to **Luz Gallegos**, executive director of [TODEC Legal Center](#) in Southern California's Inland Empire. The nonprofit mobilizes immigrant communities to build political power and demand justice while advocating for their most critical needs – from improved schools and better jobs to expanding access to medical coverage and legal protections.

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WE DISCUSS

CBS News recently reported that America's labor shortage is actually an immigrant shortage. What do you think?

“...you walk into any store, any restaurant, anywhere – everybody's hiring, everybody's hiring, but the workforce that wants to work is unable to get hired because they don't have an immigration status. So we're losing ... a tremendous amount of workforce because they don't have the ability to get a green card and work legally in the United States.” – **Luz Gallegos**

What did it take to get California to expand Medi-Cal to cover more undocumented people?

“...it's definitely been a struggle of elevating the realities, but also creating a consciousness amongst our politicians ...to hold all of those in power accountable, that they are there to represent our communities...regardless of if [we] have a green card or not because at the end of the day, we reside in their districts.

“So it's been four decades organizing and mobilizing to build power amongst the community, to hold folks accountable. So through the work that we've been doing, elevating the realities and mobilizing when we have to mobilize, but in working with partners across the state to really push on policies that reflect the needs of our community...” – **Luz Gallegos**

What has been your top priority when it comes to winning health care?

“...our biggest push has always been our elders. Why? Because for us, it's personal. It's personal that we've seen our grandparents, our great grandparents deteriorate, our parents deteriorate and give their working life to our state of California, never receiving anything in return...Now...we have full scope Medi-Cal for undocumented older adults – (age) 50-plus in the state of California. It is a dream...the challenge is, we still have a big gap, (age) 27 to 49, which is our working class...” – **Luz Gallegos**

Helpful Links

[Training Occupational Development Educating Communities \(TODEC\)](#)

[America's labor shortage is actually an immigrant shortage](#), *CBS News*

[Immigrants Are Vital to the U.S. Economy](#), *Joint Economic Committee, U.S. Congress*

[2022 Changes to the Public Charge Inadmissibility Rule and the Implications for Health Care](#), *Kaiser Family Foundation*

[Health Care Access among California's Farmworkers](#), *Public Policy Institute of California*

[Rural Migrant Health](#), *Rural Health Information Hub*

[California is expanding Medi-Cal — but hundreds of thousands of immigrants will still be left behind](#), *Cal-Matters*

Episode Transcript

Read the full [episode transcript](#).

Luz Gallegos Biography

Luz Gallegos was born and raised in California's [Inland Empire](#).

She began, "en [la causa](#), el movimiento" as a very young child with the guidance of her parents, advocating for social justice, organizing, and marching alongside with great leaders like [Bert Corona](#), [Soledad "Chole" Alatorre](#), and [Cesar E. Chavez](#).

Luz is a natural leader. Her organizing and advocating experience came first hand throughout her childhood. At a very young age she developed a community consciousness and commitment that has become part of her life.

She has led hundreds of community programs and campaigns dealing with an array of issues, immigrant rights, and civic engagement. Luz has mentored hundreds of youth and has motivated them to continue with their education while not forgetting their roots.

She continues to lead the TODEC Legal Center to give continuity to her family's community commitment and legacy.

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