

Fear of deportation not an issue for farmworkers who receive care from community health centers

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This is a historic photo of Mexican braceros harvesting potatoes on an Oregon farm in the 1940s. Credit: Photo courtesy of OSU Special Collections & Archives.

Migrant workers are more likely to receive medical care from

community health centers in partnership with faith-based organizations, a new study shows, because fear of deportation is lower than they might face at other medical facilities.

The study was recently published online in the *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*.

Daniel López-Cevallos, associate director of research at Oregon State's Center for Latino/a Studies and Engagement, said this research points to the importance of health services being administered to migrant farmworkers by trusted institutions.

López-Cevallos, who is lead author of this study, is an expert on migrant farmworker health and has worked in public health projects with rural, indigenous, and low-income communities in Ecuador, and with Latino immigrants in Oregon.

"It has been assumed in most of the literature that fear of [deportation](#) is associated with use of health services, across the board," he said. "There is a strong belief by many workers that they don't want to touch the system because it might hurt their chances of someday becoming documented or jeopardize their children's well-being."

However, that fear wasn't a factor with Oregon [migrant workers](#) in this study. The researchers interviewed 179 Mexican-origin indigenous and mestizo farmworkers who attended a community health center in the northern Willamette Valley. While the majority of workers – 87 percent – said they were afraid of deportation, this fear was not tied to their use of medical or dental care.

"So this fear of deportation exists, but in this particular community, it was not associated with use of medical services," López-Cevallos said.

The researchers found two important factors influencing use of medical services – these workers were being served by a trusted community health organization that has served the area for decades, and those who attended a local church were more likely to use dental care.

"Some churches provide support to migrant farmworkers, which may include connecting them with needed dental care," he said. "So we see that when services are offered by trusted institutions, such as a community health center or a faith-based organization, it can make all the difference."

Despite the relative confidence migrant workers expressed about [community health](#) centers and churches, only 37 percent of the farmworkers surveyed had used medical care in the previous year, a number similar to national statistics on migrant workers. Lopez-Cevallos believes many workers fear losing their jobs if they take time to see a doctor, and most don't have health insurance.

Because of these barriers and others, it's even more important to make sure safe, adequate health care is available to workers, he said, especially at times and locations that work best with fieldwork schedules.

"Migrant and seasonal farmworkers are an integral part of our food system, creating over \$3 billion in economic activity annually, just in Oregon," López-Cevallos said. "We get the benefit of their labor through our inexpensive food. It is in our best interest as a society to make sure that they, and their children, are healthy and cared for."

Provided by Oregon State University

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