

# ADDRESSING THE HEALTH NEEDS OF IMPERIAL COUNTY THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY

## Border Life

- California border counties represent a small portion of the state's population, but foreshadow larger health issues faced by a globalized world.
- The U.S.-Mexico border presents a peculiar situation where a first world collides with third world.
- The 2000 U.S. Census showed, with the exception of San Diego, that border regions tend to have predominately Latino Population. In Imperial County alone, 95% of the population is from Latin America, primarily from Mexico.
- The health concerns seen at the border are those common to emerging nations such as: respiratory and gastrointestinal diseases, heart disease, and diabetes as well as drug addictions, sexually transmitted diseases and violence.
- The U.S.-Mexico border region is characterized by migration, poverty, and environmental challenges. If this region were a state, it would rank last on access to health care, second in hepatitis deaths, third in diabetes deaths, last in per capita income and first in number of children living in poverty and without health insurance.

## Imperial County Health

- Imperial County was founded in 1907, the 58th and youngest county in California.
- The county suffers some of the highest unemployment rates and lowest wages in California. Difficulties associated with operating under varying planning and environmental regulations as enacted on both the California and Mexican sides has led to high levels of air and water contamination.
- While residents' health status has improved in some areas since 2002, poverty and environmental contamination continue to threaten the health of the population. Approximately 30% get health care in Mexico.
- Data collection is hampered by the highly mobile nature of the population, which is mostly Latino and characterized by constant binational travel.
- Residents fare worse than the California state average on several indicators including tuberculosis, diabetes, and asthma. The county has the second highest rate of uninsured residents in California.

## Food for Thought

- Environmental and economic conditions are key contributors to health disparities in Imperial County. Effective efforts to improve health services should also address poverty and environmental issues that affect this border population.
- To improve the health of the underserved residents of Imperial County, efforts must address the environmental injustices and poverty that afflict these communities as well as the consequences that the migratory cycle might have on mobile populations.
- Health at the border is a binational issue that requires the attention of Mexican and U.S. officials. Furthermore, long-term improvements in health for this population will only happen if structural inequality is addressed.



## How Do Public Policy Events Advance our Mission?

Public Policy events provide the opportunity for key stake holders, including local organizations and health advocates, to call private and public figures' attention to the health challenges faced by residents and offer suggestions on how to enhance the quality of life of the individuals affected.

## Who We Are

**The Health Initiative of the Americas (HIA)** is a program of the School of Public Health at UC Berkeley that coordinates and optimizes the availability of health resources for Latino immigrants and their families through bilateral training, research, and health promotion activities. The mission of the Health Initiative of the Americas (HIA) is to address the unmet health needs of the rapidly growing population of immigrants of Latin American origin and their families in the United States, Mexico, and other Latin American countries. Towards that end, HIA facilitates the development of innovative strategies and collaborative projects that broaden access to and use of health services, expand health insurance coverage, improve health outcomes, reduce health disparities, and enhance the cultural competency of health care providers who work with these communities (<http://hia.berkeley.edu>).

**The California Program on Access to Care (CPAC)** is an applied policy research program established in August 1997 at the behest of the California State Legislature. CPAC's directive is to address health care issues of the state's most vulnerable populations, including immigrants, agricultural workers, the working poor, and other vulnerable populations. CPAC accomplishes its mission through three major approaches: competitive grants, technical assistance, and its own program initiatives (<http://cpac.berkeley.edu/>).

**Denise Moreno Ducheny** was elected to the California State Senate on November 5, 2002, to represent the 40th District and re-elected in 2006. She represents a district which incorporates portions of San Diego and Riverside Counties and all of Imperial County. Senator Ducheny Moreno chairs the Senate Committee on Budget and Fiscal Reviews as well as the Joint Legislative Budget Committee, and is Vice Chair of the Committee on Agriculture. In addition, Senator Ducheny chairs the Senate Select Committees on California-Mexico Cooperation, the Colorado River and Oversight of the University of California Energy Labs. ([dist40.casen.govoffice.com](mailto:dist40.casen.govoffice.com))

## References

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2. Kimberly Collins, Xochitl Castaneda, Emily Felt, Life on the Border: Assessing Health Needs in Imperial County, California
3. 4th Edition CONAPO Report: Migration and Health: Latinos in the U.S. (<http://hia.berkeley.edu>).

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