

**Salvadoran-American Health Policy Brief Series No. 1:  
Uninsured Salvadorans in California**

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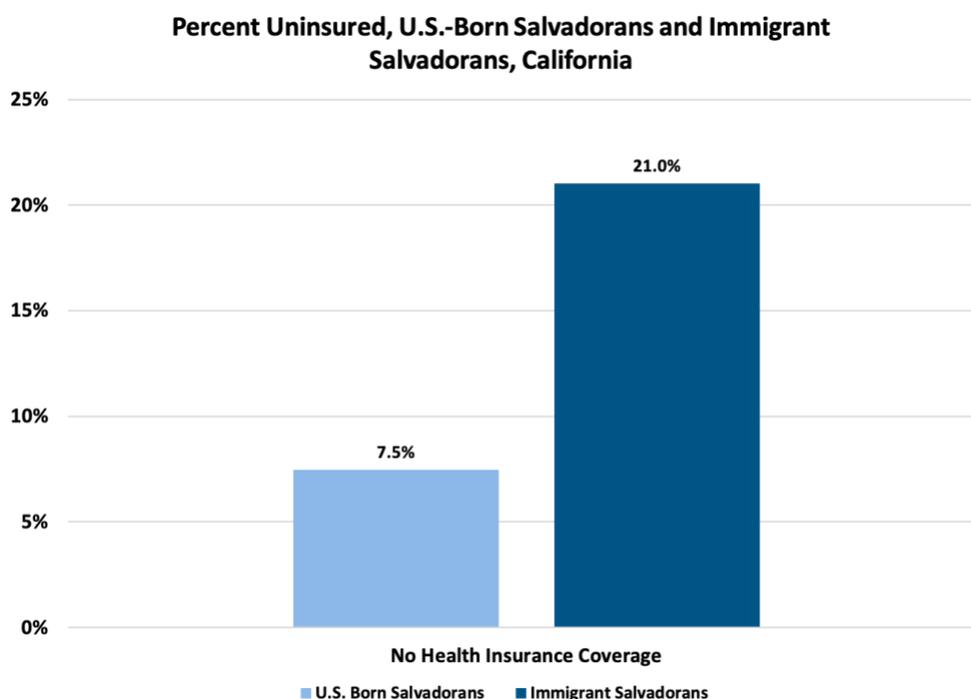
**ABOUT CESLAC**

Since 1992, the Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture (CESLAC) of the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA has provided cutting-edge, fact-based research, education, and public information about Latinos, their health, their history, and their roles in California's society and economy.

## SALVADORAN UNINSURANCE RATES

The Salvadoran-origin community has been a vibrant part of the California story since the Gold Rush.<sup>1</sup> Latino communities often lack health insurance, and this includes Salvadoran-American communities throughout the state. While all Latino communities struggle to manage the high costs of seeking health care, Salvadoran-American communities find themselves in a unique position: in addition to choosing between going without care or seeking less expensive care in Tijuana, some Salvadorans seek even lower-cost care in El Salvador.

When we disaggregate California's Salvadoran-origin population into U.S.-born and Immigrants, we find that immigrant Salvadorans are nearly three times more likely to be without health insurance than their U.S.-born counterparts.



Source: American Community ACS-IPUMS 5-year estimates, 2015-2019.

## LATINOS LACK INSURANCE

Overall, Latinos in California are twice as likely as non-Latinos not to have health insurance. Although the Affordable Care Act (ACA) significantly reduced the overall percentage of Californians without health insurance, from 2008 to 2018, the percentage of Latinos without health insurance nonetheless remained twice that of other ethnic groups.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> David E. Hayes-Bautista, Cynthia L. Chamberlin, and Nancy Zuniga, "A Gold Rush Salvadoran in California's Latino World, 1857." *Southern California Quarterly* 91:3 (2009): 257-94. <https://www.uclahealth.org/ceslac/a-gold-rush-salvadoran-in-cas-latino-world-1857>

<sup>2</sup> David E. Hayes-Bautista and Paul Hsu, "Uninsured Working Latinos and COVID-19: Essential Businesses at Risk," 2020. <https://www.uclahealth.org/ceslac/uninsured-working-latinos-and-covid-19-essential-businesses-at-risk>

## **EXPANDING HEALTH INSURANCE COVERAGE—LESSONS FROM COVID-19**

The COVID-19 pandemic especially hurt communities of color because policies failed to recognize these communities' particular situations and needs. When some individuals lost their jobs, they also lost their job-related health insurance. Others were in occupations in which employment does not guarantee access to insurance. Many retail and restaurant jobs, for example, offer only limited benefits, if any. Health insurance should be expanded to cover all persons, rather than being tied to employment. People need access to affordable health care, especially during a national health emergency.

### **NEXT STEPS**

It is essential to understand why the percentage of those without insurance is so much higher among Salvadoran immigrants, compared to U.S.-born Salvadorans. CESLAC continues to research the issue of health insurance in Latino communities. Variables such as gender, occupation, cost, and citizenship will be analyzed in the near future. The resulting information will provide a richer, more robust understanding of what is happening with this population.

Great diversity exists within the ethnic category “Latino,” which includes groups from North America, Central America, South America, and the Caribbean, each having its own history of political and social relationships with the United States. As we continue to study different Latino subpopulations, we will learn more about the groups that make up the wider Latino community. This report is part of a series examining California's Salvadoran population.

### **METHODS**

The data used in this study came from the American Community Survey ACS-IPUMS and were 5-year estimates from 2015-2019.

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For more information, or to arrange a telephone interview with the Center's Director, David E. Hayes-Bautista, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of Medicine, please contact Adriana Valdez, at (310) 794-0663 or [cesla@ucla.edu](mailto:cesla@ucla.edu).