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# A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC NEEDS OF LOW- INCOME IMMIGRANTS ON LONG ISLAND

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June 2019

## **Background**

This report is the second of three that describes the social and economic needs of low-income immigrants in Suffolk and Nassau Counties, New York, commonly referred to as Long Island. It is supported by a grant from the New York State Office of New Americans (ONA) Community Navigator Program, through a subcontract with the Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN). The first report used American Community Survey (ACS) data, from the U.S. Census Bureau, to examine the characteristics of and hardships faced by low-income immigrants on Long Island. The second report uses qualitative data collected through a series of roundtable discussions with community leaders and service providers who work with low-income immigrant communities in towns across Long Island.

For this report, we define "immigrants" as individuals who were not born in the United States. Non-citizen immigrants include both immigrants with legal status (such as green card holders, DACA recipients, residents with student visas) and undocumented immigrants. Researchers analyzed naturalized citizens separately in the first year report. In this year, roundtable participants discussed all immigrant communities they served, regardless of legal or citizenship status.

### **Characteristics of Low-Income Immigrants on Long Island**

Long Island has a large and diverse immigrant population. Outside of New York City, Long Island has the fastest growing immigrant population in the state of New York, with a net increase in the immigrant population of 50,000 between 2010 and 2015.<sup>1</sup> The top sending countries to Long Island include El Salvador (66,000), India (30,000), Dominican Republic (26,000), China (23,000), Italy (23,000), Haiti (22,000), Jamaica (20,000), Ecuador (18,000), and Colombia (17,000).<sup>2</sup> The Pew Research Center estimated that 1 in 6 immigrants on Long Island is undocumented.<sup>3</sup>

Analyses of ACS data, conducted for the first-year research report for this project, show that non-citizen immigrants make up 10 percent (106,000) of the population of Nassau County, while naturalized citizens make up 17 percent (179,000). The incomes of non-citizen immigrants are lower than other groups; 20 percent live below 125 percent of the poverty line, compared to 7 percent of naturalized citizens, and 6 percent of native-born citizens. In Suffolk County, non-

citizen immigrants make up 9 percent of the population (106,000) and naturalized citizens make up 10 percent (115,000). Like Nassau County, the incomes of non-citizen immigrants are lower than other groups; 18 percent live below 125 percent of the poverty line, compared to 9 percent of naturalized citizens and 8 percent of native-born citizens.

Non-citizen immigrants have lower education levels (36 percent and 35 percent did not complete high school in Nassau and Suffolk, respectively) and are less likely to speak English well, based on respondents' self-report (43 percent and 42 percent do not speak English well in Nassau and Suffolk, respectively), compared to naturalized and native-born citizens; thereby, limiting higher-paid employment opportunities. However, non-citizen immigrants are more likely to be employed (71 percent and 72 percent in Nassau and Suffolk, respectively) than both naturalized and native-born citizens. Over 90 percent of non-citizen immigrants in both counties have lived in the United States for at least five years.

Low-income (defined as income less than 125 percent of poverty), non-citizen immigrants face a range of hardships related to their lack of financial security. They experience high housing cost burdens (76 percent and 72 percent in Nassau and Suffolk respectively), energy cost burdens (40 percent and 56 percent), and lack of health insurance (49 percent and 43 percent). Housing cost burden is defined as spending more than one-third of income on housing, and energy cost burden is defined as spending more than 10 percent of income on utilities. Though low-income immigrants face these hardships at much higher levels than higher-income, non-citizen immigrants, even among higher-income, non-citizen immigrants close to one in three spends at least one-third of their income on housing and have no health insurance. Immigrants' restricted eligibility for public benefits, such as Medicaid, may exacerbate these hardships.

### **Policy Landscape Affecting Immigrants on Long Island**

Long Island has received over 8,500 unaccompanied minors (UAM), children and teenager immigrants who arrived in the United States without their parents, primarily from El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala, since 2014.<sup>4</sup> Nassau and Suffolk counties have been in the top 15 receiving counties in the country for UAM since 2014. Related to the large influx of UAM from Central America, local and national immigration debates have referenced MS-13 gang activity on Long Island. Some policymakers have called for greater crackdowns on immigrants who they believe are involved in gangs,<sup>5</sup> while others believe that increased immigration enforcement has stoked fear among immigrants, preventing them from reporting gang activity.<sup>6</sup>

Many immigrants on Long Island are legally present in the United States due to the Temporary Protected Status (TPS) program. This program is slated to end in 2020 for El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras (on hold), and Haiti; thereby, removing the legal status of immigrants from these countries and rendering them undocumented.<sup>7</sup> Suffolk County alone estimates that it has 11,534 immigrants who are TPS holders from these countries.<sup>8</sup>

In the fall of 2018, the federal government proposed changes to the public charge rule that is used, among other factors, to determine whether an immigrant can receive legal permanent residence (i.e., a green card). The proposed rule would allow the government to consider an immigrant's receipt of a broad range of public benefit programs to determine if an immigrant is likely to become a public charge, thereby, likely leading federal authorities to deny green cards to a larger number of immigrants.<sup>9</sup> These proposed rules are not currently in effect.

Furthermore, they only apply to immigrants who are applying for a green card and to immigrants who use public benefits for themselves, not for their children. However, misinformation about the proposed rules have stoked fear in many immigrant communities. Researchers estimate that the percentage of immigrants using public benefits would decline by between 20-60 percent because of these fears.<sup>10</sup>

The federal government has increased detentions of undocumented immigrants in the interior of the United States since 2016. In a departure from the previous administration, ICE no longer prioritizes deportation of immigrants with criminal convictions, leading to the deportation of a rising share of immigrants with no criminal history.<sup>11,12</sup> These changes have led to increased fear among many immigrants about the increased likelihood that they or their family will be deported.

On Monday, June 17, 2019, Governor Andrew Cuomo signed into law a bill to increase access to driver's licenses, including to undocumented immigrants. New York now joins twelve states and the District of Columbia who have enacted similar legislation.<sup>13</sup> This law presents a solution to reported incidences of immigrants being deported following arrest for driving without a license, although challenges remain in implementation.

## **Second Year Research Questions and Methods**

In collaboration with CARECEN, the research team developed a set of research questions for the first-year roundtables. Based on the findings of the first-year report, the research team and

CARECEN staff developed an extended set of research questions for the second-year roundtables. The first-year questions focused on the characteristics and recent changes in the immigrant community, as well as the primary service needs of low-income immigrants. The second-year questions were informed by the first-year research report and the roundtables and probed about the service needs of low-income immigrants, specifically focusing on housing, transportation, English language classes, and health care. The questions also asked about the impact of recent federal proposals and policies regarding immigration on the immigrant community. The full list of questions is in the appendix of the report.

### **Data Collection and Methods**

During the first and second years of this project, CARECEN hosted a series of roundtable discussions across Long Island, in towns that represent the geographic and demographic diversity of Long Island. The roundtables brought together community leaders and service providers who work with the immigrant community. The roundtable locations and dates are listed in Table 1 below. Qualitative data collected during these roundtables are used as data for this report.

In the first year of the project, CARECEN staff took notes and recorded the roundtables. The recordings were used to fill gaps in the notes. Extensive notes for the 4 roundtables were shared with the research team for analysis. In the second year of the project, the research team attended 4 of 10 roundtables that occurred prior to the writing of this report, at which the research team took extensive notes. One roundtable was cancelled, and for the remaining 2 roundtables, CARECEN staff recorded the roundtables, took detailed notes, and shared the notes with the research team. The research team developed codes for analyzing the roundtable notes. The roundtable notes were coded, using ATLAS.ti 8, to identify primary themes across the roundtables.

The results of this analysis, presented below, describe the primary themes, or issues, identified through the roundtables. The report describes current services provided to immigrants in Nassau and Suffolk Counties that relate to these issues, and it identifies ways in which the immigrant community could benefit from additional services and funding for those services.

Table 1. Roundtable Locations and Dates

<u>Year 1</u>		
<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Number Attended</b> (not including CARECEN or NCCP staff)
Hempstead	February 28, 2018	7
Brentwood	May 1, 2018	3
Huntington Station	June 7, 2018	8
Central Islip	June 20, 2018	5
<u>Year 2</u>		
<b>Location</b>	<b>Date</b>	<b>Number Attended</b>
Patchogue	October 18, 2018	9
Riverhead	November 28, 2018	7
Hempstead	February 6, 2019	6
Brentwood	March 5, 2019	6
Hampton Bays	April 11, 2019	7
Huntington Station	May 7, 2019	3
Central Islip	May 21, 2019	5
Mineola (Focus on Freeport)	May 22, 2019	5
Wyandanch	June 4, 2019	10
Elmont	cancelled	cancelled
Hempstead (focus on Nassau County)	June 28, 2019	4

Fear and community integration

Much of the roundtable discussions centered on fear, originating from increased immigration enforcement and a perceived rise in violence in Long Island caused by MS-13, a gang that originated in Los Angeles among Central American youth.<sup>14</sup> There is fear on all sides among communities in Long Island, threatening community integration by increasing community divisions. Immigrants often fear deportation, family separation, and authorities in power, primarily the police and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). This fear prevents them from seeking essential services, including health care and English classes and from trusting

well-intentioned service providers. Immigrants express fear of reporting crimes to the police if they have been victimized. Immigrants' fear of law enforcement makes them particularly vulnerable to crimes because the perpetrators know they will likely not report them to the police. One roundtable participant mentioned that Latinos are known as "walking ATMs" in her community because they tend to carry cash on their person due to lack of comfort with opening bank accounts.

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*"They get beat up and get their money stolen."  
- Patchogue 2018 roundtable*

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Stakeholders at roundtables noted that reporting crimes is more difficult when police do not have Spanish speakers on staff, or do not consistently use Language Line Solutions, an on-demand translation service accessible through smart phones.

*Fear as a barrier to accessing public benefits and services*

With discussion at the national level on the [proposed changes to the public charge rule](#), immigrants are more fearful of accessing services for themselves and their children, even beyond those covered under the potential public charge rule, such as WIC and emergency Medicaid. As a result, many organizations are experiencing lower attendance and lower demand for government-based services, although this varies by locale. Some organizations report that immigrants are even fearful of going into a school because they believe that utilizing any government service may negatively affect them in the future.

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*"People are fearful of accessing benefits and accessing health resources...There's a constant need for reassurance and letting people know about public charge. I was reading that there's a 10% decrease in SNAP enrollment. The Director of SNAP services approached me and said, 'They've all dropped like flies.' If it involves the government, they don't want to do that. Programs like WIC aren't even proposed to be affected, and people are dropping out of that program too."  
- Brentwood 2019 roundtable*

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### *Fear of immigrants by nonimmigrant community*

Some nonimmigrants fear the immigrant community, pointing to recent violence coinciding with the influx of new immigrants, particularly the influx of unaccompanied minors. This fear is magnified by media coverage of MS-13 gang violence and the Trump administration's frequent focus on reducing unauthorized immigration.

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*“There’s a lot misinformation that exists in Huntington. If you were to go by data for every 15 immigrants, 14 are documented and 1 is undocumented, but if you ask any Huntington resident, [they will say], ‘Oh they’re all undocumented and MS-13.’ They generalize and then demonize the community. Obviously, immigrants aren’t then going to go out and ask for resources. They’re intimidated.”*

*- Huntington Station 2018 roundtable*

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*“Prejudice is a barrier. The invisible divisionary lines that exist in the town of Huntington. For example, my office is located in Greenlawn, so many of my clients are Caucasian. People from one Huntington Station won’t go into Northport or Greenlawn and vice versa. My white clients from Northport won’t come to Huntington Station even when I tell them I’ll be there on Thursday, and they won’t need an appointment. They’ll drive by and not come inside. They’d rather wait three weeks to see me in Greenlawn.”*

*- Huntington Station 2018 roundtable*

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*“At the same time, the mom I told you about earlier who is working with a lawyer and she was told to keep in mind and tell her friends that if you’re picked up, don’t give what country you’re from and don’t say you’re Salvadoran because automatically you’re MS-13. Even hearing that as a worker, I was surprised because I’m Salvadoran and to be targeted like that is crazy.”*

*– Brentwood 2018 roundtable*

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### *Barriers to community integration*

Roundtable participants cited fear of deportation as the primary barrier to community integration. Integration is also affected by legal status, language ability, country of origin, religion, and years living in the U.S. Nonimmigrants and immigrants both perceive neighborhoods with high numbers of immigrants as dangerous, and this image has been perpetuated by media coverage of these areas. While many immigrants feel unwelcome by receiving communities, they still



move to Long Island because they have family members or friends from their home country residing there

Roundtable participants also identified a lack of resources and infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing immigrant community on Long Island as another factor in community division. Perceived competition for limited resources fosters resentment in the receiving community against the immigrant community. The sentiment is summed up in one participant's adage, *"If I have this cake, and I give you a piece of it, there's less cake for me"* (Central Islip 2019 roundtable). As a result of these barriers and perceptions, residents are less likely to interact with others outside of their identity groups, creating divisions even within the immigrant community, and offering partial explanation for why many immigrants do not engage in advocacy.

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*"People need their basic needs met, and unless they feel like they can get their needs met and can feel comfortable in their daily life, then they can get more involved and feel like part of a community."*

*- Huntington Station 2018 roundtable*

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#### *Current programs and policies that address fear and promote community integration*

Roundtable participants agreed that offering consistent information and culturally-informed, bilingual services alleviates fear. Programs that provide legal assistance and inform immigrants how to navigate the systems in the U.S. are particularly needed. Programs that are currently in place to assist with navigation of U.S. systems and create trust across communities include:

- Know Your Rights trainings and workshops and trainings on integration, such as
  - The Madres Latinas Amigas program offered by Patchogue-Medford Library group includes different speakers every month who speak with members about various needed services and resources (e.g., immigration attorneys, guidance counselors, first time home-buyers presentation, health presentations). These sessions help immigrants get acquainted with necessary systems.
  - The Riverhead Free Library hosts Amigas Latinas, a group similar to the Patchogue-Medford Library group. Amigas Latinas group serves as a source of support, educating and informing community members on activities and supporting members in adapting to their new community.

- The South Huntington School District holds well-attended seminars each quarter with nonprofit agencies to teach parents on how to navigate available services and resources.
- Social workers in schools assist immigrant parents and offer reassurance that their children are safe in school.
- English as a Second Language (ESL) classes offer a bridge to other information and services. Bilingual professionals and signs in Spanish create a more welcoming environment.
- Programs that aim to foster trust include:
  - Cafe con la Familia is a partnership with Suffolk County Police Department aimed at decreasing fear of local law enforcement.
  - The Long Island Civic Engagement Table engages people from immigrant communities to be the face of the organization and deliver essential information to foster trust among community members.
  - Organizations that deliver services and programs to places immigrants frequent, including laundromats, churches, and salons, are more likely to build trusting relationships with immigrants.
- Language Line Solutions: Organización Latino Americana (OLA) worked with Southampton Town Police Department to enable police officers to better communicate with Spanish speakers in the community. See [this article](#) for more information.
- Some libraries have programs to celebrate Hispanic culture.

*Additional supports to foster community integration*

Much of the additional support needed to facilitate integration overlaps with initiatives to alleviate fear in the community and foster trust between divisions in the community.

- Continued advocacy and culturally-informed, bilingual service support is needed.
- Other organizations should consider training people in their client community themselves to deliver essential services or programs (e.g., the Long Island Civic Engagement Table).
- Increased opportunities for dialogue between immigrants and nonimmigrant communities may decrease misconceptions of the immigrant community as dangerous.

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*“Part of it is that you try to identify leaders to bring others in, but then they try to emphasize that it’s non-hierarchical. Yeah, that’s great when you have groups of well-meaning people discussing these topics, but there’s a point where you have to step aside and provide the opportunity to on-board new leaders. When you have groups of white people who are advocating, how are you teaching them to reach out in their community and empower their non-white neighbors to step up for themselves. Who are these people? They’re assistant superintendents of schools, they run nonprofits, that’s all great. But they’re not helping the people in the community become the needed leaders, and that’s the problem, the elephant in the room.”*

*- Patchogue 2018 roundtable*

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- Representation of immigrant communities in local leadership, such as on school boards, is needed in order to create leadership buy-in for the importance of community integration and helping them understand the immigrant experience.
- Bundling information within services and coordinating a consistent message across services and programs will increase immigrants’ trust in the service providers.
- More culturally competent and bilingual staff in all services, including the police department, would enable immigrant communities to better navigate systems (schools, public benefits, healthcare) and report crimes.
  - Police need incentives to use Language Line Solutions products or become certified interpreters.

### Legal Concerns

There is an immense need for affordable legal services, resulting from the growth in the immigrant population in Long Island and changes to immigration policy at the national level. Legal concerns of immigrants center on these changes, particularly the ending of Temporary Protected Status (TPS) in 2020 and the change in the Special Immigrant Juvenile status from applying to children under the age of 21, to those only under the age of 18.<sup>15</sup> The former affects those of Central American or Haitian origin, who are represented in high numbers in the Long Island immigrant community, while the latter applies to a large percentage of unaccompanied minors who have been placed with sponsors in Long Island in recent years. It has become more and more difficult over the years to obtain legal status or citizenship. Community roundtable participants mentioned that the waitlist for the U-Visa, another option for youth and adults who are victims of crime, increased from 2 to 5 years, and another mentioned a 2 year waitlist for

applying for status under the Violence Against Women Act (Huntington Station 2018 roundtable; Riverhead 2018 roundtable). As a result of the difficulty in gaining legal status, there has been an increase in immigrants seeking information to make arrangements for their U.S.-citizen children if they are to be deported, like establishing a legal caretaker.

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*“I’ve been working on TPS on a different angle in explaining the economic effects of TPS ending. The reality is that not many people are drawn to the humanity of TPS ending. Huntington Station stands to lose a lot economically when TPS ends. We have so many service industries that rely on the immigrant population, and so much of that is worked by people with TPS. Those business owners are going to struggle because they won’t have anyone to take those jobs. You won’t just come upon 3,000 people who want to do those jobs because there’s a reason why immigrants are doing them with such low pay.”*  
- Huntington Station 2018 roundtable

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Compounding immigration concerns are complaints about increased surveillance of the Latino community by local police departments. Roundtable participants shared anecdotes about immigrants being arrested for minor violations, like a broken turn signal or simply because they were suspected to be affiliated with a gang (Central Islip 2018 roundtable).

There are also reports of people being taken advantage of by private attorneys who receive payments, but do not complete cases. One roundtable participant mentioned that there is some confusion among Latino immigrants between notarios and notaries. Notarios in Latin American countries are lawyers; some people exploit immigrants’ confusion over these terms.

Other legal concerns among immigrants include wage theft, housing issues, and driver’s licenses (All roundtables except for one convened prior to the passage of the Green Light bill, the law to increase access to driver’s licenses). There is also need for information about how to navigate the legal system and a lack of capacity for affordable immigration-related legal assistance to meet the growing need. Some undocumented immigrants are given incorrect or false documentation by their employers to prove their work status because they are working “under the table.” When these documents are presented in court, it damages their credibility and case.

In addition, immigrants’ housing issues often overlap with their legal concerns. Roundtable participants mentioned multiple instances of immigrants being evicted from their homes illegally, but they have no recourse as they are too afraid to report their landlords.

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*“They’re not going to call the police on their landlord because they’re always being told, ‘You’re illegal, so if you call the police, you’re going to get deported.’ Whatever the case may be, whether it’s housing, domestic violence, unemployment.” – Riverhead 2018 roundtable*

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#### *Current programs and policies that address this issue*

- The Nassau Department of Labor has been investigating wage theft at the urging of immigrant advocates.
- Organizations like CARECEN offer legal clinics and have pro bono attorneys. Another organization, Adelante, has a paralegal come in weekly to speak with immigrant clients.
- Know Your Rights Trainings and workshops to educate immigrants on their legal rights are essential for assuaging fear and encouraging immigrants to report abuse from employers or landlords.

#### *Additional supports needed*

- Continued and expanded funding to support nonprofit and pro bono legal support that is not under the legal services restriction is needed. Grants with the [legal services restriction](#) (LSC) prohibit the grantee from performing certain activities and from representing specific categories of clients, including undocumented immigrants unless specifically allowed by statute or regulation. Exceptions include permanent residency and limited other lawful statuses, victims of domestic violence, trafficking and other abuses, and special situations such as international child abduction and citizenship in certain Native American tribes or Pacific island nations. These restrictions apply to the use of LSC funds, and in many situations, to a grantee’s use of other funds like private and nonprofit funds.
- Cases are increasing and there is limited capacity to take on the additional caseload. Organizations require additional funding to hire paralegals, whose services may cost less than hiring more lawyers, but still could offer some legal assistance to immigrants.

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*“The biggest issue is legal assistance. They think that we have an office here, but we’ll be here once or twice a month. We only have one staff immigration attorney, but the need is tremendous”*  
*- Huntington Station 2018 roundtable*

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- Any identification card, similar to NYC ID, would help with accessing other services, like opening a bank account or entering a school. This may also help reduce robberies of undocumented immigrants, if they are able to establish bank accounts with the ID to deposit their earnings.

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*“Even a photo ID is important when parents try to go into the schools that now require ID. Because of all the school violence, the schools increased their security. But since it’s a scanning system and you can’t scan a doctor’s note or just anything that might already be available. It’s causing a big problem that keeps more parents out because they can’t scan any ID. If you thought that they weren’t feeling welcome before, imagine the increase.”*  
*- Patchogue 2018 roundtable*

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- Organizations could deliver know your rights trainings and workshops in accessible places, at locations immigrants will already be present.

### Mental Health

With the immense amount of fear among immigrants, there is a need for more mental health services for immigrants. Moreover, many immigrants have experienced trauma in their home countries or from migrating to the U.S. that also require professional medical attention.

While services may be available, there are several barriers to accessing these services. Several roundtable participants identified a cultural stigma of mental illness in the Latino community, preventing people from seeking help for mental illness or mental health. In addition, there may not be mental health professionals who speak languages that immigrants need, the costs for treatment may be unaffordable, and immigrants may choose not to prioritize this need.

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*“Families are making arrangements for their children and setting up guardianship in case of deportation. The fear is impacting the mental health in the family as they handle the planning of legal needs. It’s the challenges of the immediate needs and the long term.”*

*- Hempstead 2018 roundtable*

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#### *Current programs and policies that address this issue*

- The Family Service League offers a mental health program. If immigrants are undocumented, however, they do not have access to health insurance to cover these services. If patients present a pay stub, they can reduce the \$100 intake fee for paying out of pocket.
- Schools have social workers to work with children and their parents.
- One organization, the [Family Service League](#), offers trainings with prenatal families on

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*“You can see a lot of people go to therapy now. They’re scared and the kids are traumatized. they don’t want to go out. You hear a lot around here that Immigration is on some street in Riverhead, so they don’t want to go out.”*

*- Riverhead 2018 roundtable*

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post-partum depression as part of their [Healthy Families Suffolk](#) program.

- [The Rural and Migrant Ministry](#) offer support and self-esteem groups.

#### *Additional supports needed*

- There is a need for affordable, bilingual mental health professionals to serve the immigrant community. Currently, the need exceeds the capacity. Many participants expressed frustration that they often must recruit professionals from outside the community, who may have the qualifications, but may not understand the community as intimately as a resident.
- Some roundtable participants mentioned the need for a place for youth to go to feel safe and interact with one another.

- Again, offering mental health services at places where immigrants already frequent for legal assistance or food assistance may normalize mental health help-seeking behavior.

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*“They’ve been traumatized, they live in trauma, and we have to call social workers or link up with other resources to help. If it was something that CARECEN could offer in house, then we could just say, ‘Hey we have a kid that I think you may have to see’ and set it up in house. Now and in the past, we have to refer out. Even 3 weeks ago, I had to ask a client if they would like me to seek some help for them, a psychologist or psychiatrist. He said no, so I asked if he felt comfortable with me or my supervisor. He said he’d rather continue speaking with us. So we’ve built trust, and now they don’t want to go out. If we had it in house, then they would feel more comfortable and see that it’s CARECEN-provided.”*

*- Brentwood 2018 roundtable*

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- There is a need for more support groups and/or social groups for immigrants.
- Mental health programs should be incorporated into school curriculums to normalize mental health issues, and encourage youth to seek help.
- There is a need for more social workers in schools, and more supports for youth who have been exposed to trauma.

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*“There is a tremendous need for social workers. We have 2600 students and 2 social workers. With the challenges that we have - 600 students considered English language learners – how do you manage that? You are just putting out fires. There’s no mandate for the proper number of social workers to student ratio. When I visited El Salvador last August (to learn more about schools there), I asked them what they would want if they could have anything in their schools. Every school I went to, they said they need psychologists. For us and our kids. Because they have members of 2 different gangs in the same school. It’s very stressful. That says a lot about the mental and social challenges. Those issues come with them across the border.”*

*– Central Islip 2019 roundtable*

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### Education and youth

Immigrant children face barriers to learning because of language, legal status, and mental health issues. Moreover, their parents may face cultural and language barriers, making it difficult for them to be engaged with their child’s education.



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*“I think that the language and literacy barriers are big ones... At parent-teacher meetings, if the teacher doesn't speak Spanish or another language and the parent doesn't speak English, then it's very difficult to have a meaningful conversation about the child's progress and needs. I know in some schools that I've been involved with my own children, that they do their best to have someone there to translate. But that's not always possible, and that's just one issue.”*

*- Riverhead 2018 roundtable*

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Another challenge mentioned in the roundtables is motivating immigrant children to stay in school, because they face pressure to work and earn money. Young undocumented immigrants are incentivized to stay in school because it is a requirement for DACA renewals; however, according to one roundtable participant, they are able to easily find jobs and earn money. They also may have family obligations that require them to take time off from school. One participant told us that students need to earn money to, for example, pay for legal assistance to resolve their legal status, preventing them from being able to get higher degrees.

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*“There are a lot of immigrant student drop outs. One reason for high rates of drop outs is that many students don't know what their educational options are after high school because they are undocumented or have parents who are undocumented.”*

*- Central Islip 2019 roundtable*

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*“Her job is more attractive than going to college. [Going to college is] a sacrifice. And not a lot of them are willing to do that.”*

*- Central Islip 2019 roundtable*

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Schools vary in their level of inclusivity of immigrant students depending upon leadership in the schools. They also struggle to hire qualified bilingual staff and do not have enough social workers to meet the needs of all of their students.

Schools and families are also concerned about the influx of young people and the strain it has had on school resources. They are also concerned about the gang presence in the school - that their children will be bullied or harassed by gang members or recruited into the gangs. Immigrant children face not only these fears but also discrimination from nonimmigrants who make assumptions about gang affiliation based on their race or way of dress.

### *Current programs and policies that address this issue*

- The mission of the Bilingual Advisory Board in the South Huntington School District is “to increase parent engagement and meet the needs of [the] multi-bilingual community” ([South Huntington Schools website](#)). They provide assistance to Spanish-speaking families for navigating the school website, parent portal, and other school-related information and resources.
- Some organizations run after-school programs for youth. They have Spanish speaking volunteers who help students with homework after school.
- The Freeport School District gave all students an orientation tour of the library and have hired Spanish speaking people who can help students.
- In Central Islip, there are signs at schools that are in Spanish and English, an interpreter at board meetings, and the publication of newsletters in 2 languages (Central Islip 2018 roundtable).
- The Patchogue-Medford School District offers Rosetta Stone to school staff for learning Spanish and Turkish.
- The Patchogue Public Library offers the Intercambio - English as a New Language (ENL) program. Students who regularly attend Intercambio have higher scores on NYSESLAT - an English proficiency test.

### *Additional supports needed*

Additional support is needed for fostering school environments that encourage parents and students to engage in schools.

- Continued funding and support for above programs that provide services and information to parents through the schools as well as replicating the best practices in inclusive schools at other schools is needed. These programs should aim to help parents and students navigate the school system, the college application process, and understand financial aid.
- Schools can waive the photo ID requirement for certain parents or issue parents of students an ID so that they are not afraid to enter schools.
- In order to meet the needs of their student population, schools must hire more bilingual support staff and teachers or create opportunities for current staff to learn Spanish and other languages commonly spoken by immigrant families in their schools.

- Organizations can partner with schools to provide education for school leadership, teachers, and support staff on cultural sensitivity and best practices for working with the immigrant community.
- With additional support, organizations can create of support groups for youth, operated in partnership with schools.
- Community members should consider creating spaces for low-income youth where they could feel safe and interact with one another. While there was discussion of a youth center under construction in Long Island, it is unaffordable for many immigrants to access the services and facilities (Brentwood 2019 roundtable).

### Transportation

Roundtable participants frequently noted the lack of support for public and private transportation on Long Island as a barrier for immigrants seeking educational resources, health care, legal services, and employment.

- Public buses do not come frequently enough, stop service early in the evening, have limited service in some locales, and take significantly more time than driving.
- The Long Island Rail Road can be prohibitively expensive for not only immigrants, but low-income residents overall.
- Online rideshare services like Uber or Lyft and cabs are expensive, and because they often require credit cards, they are inaccessible to undocumented immigrants who are unable to open bank accounts because of lack of ID.
- Undocumented immigrants, up until the passage of the Green Light bill, did not have access to driver's licenses, which further limited their options. As a necessity for health care or employment, many undocumented immigrants drive without licenses, putting their lives and those of other drivers at risk. One stakeholder recounted how one of her clients who was undocumented got pulled over on the way from driving his mother from a lawyer's office and was arrested for driving without a license, which placed her at risk for deportation. The passage of Green Light will likely result in safer roads for the entire community and provide one level of protection against deportation.

Children of undocumented immigrants are also affected; children are less able to access services, like bilingual classes which are offered in only three or four schools in Patchogue. In addition, if a child gets sick at school, the parent has no way of picking them up if they cannot

drive or do not have money for a cab. As a result of poor transit options along with other factors, many organizations have cited low turnout to events, classes, and workshops (e.g., Know Your Rights trainings, English classes). Further, it is difficult for organizations to refer people to resources they need because of the difficulty of accessing services without transportation.

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*“It’s very hard to refer out, which we often have to do, because people can’t get to Hempstead. They can’t get to the other towns as easily. We need more organizations here, for both advocacy and basic service provision.”*  
- Patchogue 2018 roundtable

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*“We’ve had moms that say they haven’t gone to the doctors because they didn’t have a ride or money for a cab.” - Brentwood 2018 roundtable*

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*“I have so many students’ driving illegally because they have to get to work.”*  
– Central Islip 2018 roundtable

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*“Transportation is profound. It’s a major, major issue. We have patients taking 4 buses each way to get chemotherapy. For 4 hours.” – Central Islip 2019 roundtable*

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This issue overlaps with the housing issue, because transportation and other resources are concentrated in city centers, areas that have higher rent. Immigrants often are forced to live farther away from city centers because they are unable to afford rent in these areas.

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*“Economically they can’t get to the services due to transportation. You need money for taxi if you don’t have a license. People can’t always come to the service and follow through even once they have a referral of where to go.” – Central Islip 2018 roundtable*

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*Current programs and policies that address this issue*

- One roundtable participant mentioned The Nassau Inter-County Express (NICE) bus as a reliable public transit option. Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA, or NYC subway) tickets can be also used on NICE buses. NICE has an app-based pilot program that allows bus riders to obtain real time arrival information for their bus and buy tickets through the app. Suffolk County also has launched the [Suffolk FastFare](#) app for purchasing tickets. These app-based options, however, are limited to those who can access a bank account.
- Medicaid - New York State Department of Health contracts with transportation management companies to manage non-emergency fee-for-service transportation. In Long Island the company is LogistiCare Solutions. The Medicaid Non-Emergency Medical Transportation benefit (NEMT) “requires that states must ensure necessary transportation to and from providers, use the most appropriate form of transportation, and include coverage for transportation and related travel expenses necessary to secure medical examinations and treatment” ([NY Department of Health](#)).
- Delivering services to where people are already frequenting (laundromats, grocery stores, churches, places of employment) would enable immigrants to better access services and programs.
  - One roundtable participant mentioned [mobile mammography vans](#) for cancer screenings to those who cannot easily travel to their doctors or hospital.
- Organizations should consider public transit schedules and options when scheduling classes and locations for delivering services.
- Some organizations have some limited funding to provide transportation. For example, one roundtable participant’s organization had funding for some of their patients to take cabs after cancer treatments, rather than making them take multiple buses home.
- Bike shares (Zagster in Suffolk County) is expanding to less affluent areas, providing discounts for low-income residents.
- Hudson River Health (HRH) Medical Center will pick up people to attend their mother’s group.
- OLA has a program just on the East End of Long Island that has a driver who takes people to medical appointments; however, this is limited to the South Fork for now.
- Organizations often have to refer people to other organizations for services they do not offer. They can better assist their immigrant clients by bringing representatives of referral organizations to the offices where immigrants are once a week, for example, for a legal clinic, or for assistance with health insurance. Adelante has representatives from

insurance companies in their offices once a week to address their clients' questions and concerns.

- [The Huntington Opportunity Resource Center](#) manages a transportation book containing resources for where people can go for help with transportation.
- [The Retreat](#), an organization that provides domestic violence and sexual assault services, provides transportation assistance to and from court for their clients.
- [The Rural and Migrant Ministry](#) picks up people to attend their meetings.

#### *Additional supports needed*

Beyond better public transit infrastructure, which is beyond the control of many services organizations, there are specific ways they could support the transit needs of their immigrant clients.

- Continued and expanded funding for providing transportation to services or for delivering services to where immigrants are living or working is needed. Funds could also be used to provide bikes to immigrants or to create a bike donation system.
- Organizations can facilitate educational workshops with bank employees and immigrants about assisting them with opening bank accounts. This would help with paying bills online and also allow immigrants to potentially obtain credit cards to pay for ride share services, such as Uber or Lyft, and utilize bus apps to buy tickets.
- Organizations should consider how to address possible challenges with the passage of the Green Light law. For example, addressing a procedure for requirements to prove age and identity for undocumented immigrants may be helpful.

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*“Having a driver’s license means so many fewer people are given tickets. In South Hampton village on your second stop as an unlicensed driver, they take your car away. Then your car is in impound for a couple of months, you can’t go to work without the car to pay the bill to get the car back. Just the ability to take your kids to the doctor or to school. Or getting yourself to a job. Having a car makes such a difference.”*

*– Riverhead 2018 roundtable*

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- The creation of a transportation forum could allow several organizations to petition the transportation authorities in Long Island to make more bus stops

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*“After 5 or 6 pm the buses, that already don’t run timely, are even more infrequent. If you can’t drive or rely on public transit, then how do you get around? A driver’s license would be a major start. It’s something that’s a priority.”*

*- Patchogue 2018 roundtable*

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### Coordination of services

Roundtable participants noted that an overarching barrier for integration is the lack of coordination of services and programs for immigrants. While there is a need for more services and programs to meet the needs of the growing immigrant population, it is often unclear to both service providers and immigrants what the current landscape of services looks like. This makes it difficult for providers to recommend locally available resources and programs for their clients’ range of needs.

### *Current programs and policies that address this issue*

- The Huntington Opportunity Resource Center compiled a resource guide for use by service providers to better refer clients to services and programs could be an important tool for front-line service providers.

### *Additional supports needed*

- A strategic, specific, sustainable, and goal-oriented effort is needed to improve coordination among immigrant- serving organizations on Long Island. This would require more funding, leadership, and staff to direct the effort for coordination and additional supports for immigrant community navigators to connect immigrant-serving organizations. Increased coordination could result in a shared resources guide across organizations. Such a guide can include a map and strategic plan to ensure that information within the guide is up to date.

## Conclusions

Long Island offers a complex environment as a welcoming home to low-income immigrants. It is home to a diverse and large immigrant community, some with long-term roots in the area and some who are newly emerging communities. Long Island has received many unaccompanied minors, and it has been the focus of conversations about Central American gangs, such as MS-13. The services available for immigrants are not enough to meet the growing needs of the community.

The passage of Green Light will increase immigrants' access to driver's licenses in NY to undocumented immigrants, addressing some of the key issues faced in Long Island. It is worth noting, however, that no senator representing Long Island voted for the passage of Green Light, indicating constituent division and opposition against this measure. Due to this and other factors, implementation of the Green Light law may be challenging in this region.

Better mapping and coordination of current services for immigrants in Long Island would be an important step toward improving services. Additionally, providing services to help immigrants navigate the current landscape of U.S. systems, such as the school system and available supports would be an important first step.

There is an overwhelming need for additional resources to address the myriad legal challenges faced by the immigrant community. These challenges are growing under the current administration and they have left legal service providers struggling to keep up with current demand.

Affordable, linguistically appropriate, and culturally sensitive mental health services are needed. Finding enough providers to provide these services is likely to be challenging. Finding less provider intensive and costly ways to support mental health challenges through support groups, youth activities, or through social workers within school systems could partially address this need.

English language classes provide an important skill and serve as a bridge to other services. Funding for lower-level ESL is important to retain to ensure the healthy integration of immigrants on Long Island and decrease discrimination.



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