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New Data: The Diverse Immigrant Communities of Central Virginia Provide Key Contributions, Yet Face Barriers to Health Coverage

RICHMOND, VA -- The diverse immigrant communities of the Richmond region are woven into the economy and communities. Yet despite most immigrants in the region having high levels of education, with over half having at least some college education, many families face high housing costs as a share of their incomes and health insurance coverage lags.

Over 1 in 5 area immigrants work in Central Virginia service occupations, meaning many are front-line, essential workers during this pandemic, according to a report by The Commonwealth Institute for Fiscal Analysis. And many immigrant workers on the front lines face barriers to health insurance coverage. Naturalized foreign-born residents have slightly lower rates of health coverage than U.S. born residents, and this trend is even more pronounced for people who are not citizens.

“Policymakers should work to close health coverage gaps, especially during this pandemic, and address remaining challenges such as removing the ‘40 quarters’ barrier to Medicaid coverage facing some lawful permanent residents,” said Laura Goren, Institute Research Director and co-author of the report.

Among the report's key findings:

- Immigrants in Central Virginia are diverse, long-standing pillars of the community
  - Almost 1 in 10 of all foreign-born Virginians live in central Virginia, and 44% of immigrants in the region reside in Henrico County.
  - The race, ethnicity, and country of origin of immigrants in the region is diverse - over 8 in 10 immigrants in the region are people of color, and central Virginia immigrants come from all global regions.
  - 17% of children in central Virginia have at least one foreign-born parent, demonstrating that many Virginia immigrants put down roots, build families, and are raising tomorrow’s community leaders and innovators.
  - Nearly half of foreign-born residents in central Virginia are U.S. citizens.
- **Central Virginia immigrants are well-educated and work in a variety of fields**
  - Over 1 in 5 area immigrants work in service occupations, meaning many are front-line, essential workers during this pandemic.
  - Foreign-born residents have a higher rate of labor force participation than U.S. born residents of the region.
  - Over half (55%) of the foreign-born population in central Virginia have attained at least some college education or higher, and 4 in 10 have a bachelor’s degree or a professional degree -- higher rates than for the foreign-born population nationally.

- **Central Virginia immigrants have found success, although challenges remain**
  - Median household incomes for immigrants and for U.S.-born residents are similar and relatively high at about $70,000, though earnings lag for some immigrants of color.
  - Over a quarter of all foreign-born area residents pay more than 30% of their income towards housing costs.
  - Health coverage gaps remain - naturalized foreign-born residents have lower rates of health coverage than U.S. born residents, and this trend is even more pronounced for people who are not citizens.

“Moving at the state and local level to break down barriers and better welcome immigrants into Virginia’s communities and economy is the right thing to do for Virginia’s families and future,” says Goren.

The full report, [Pillars of the Central Virginia Community: A Profile of Our Immigrant Neighbors](www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org), is available at [www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org](http://www.thecommonwealthinstitute.org). A Spanish-language version and reports about immigrant communities in the Hampton Roads and northern Virginia regions are also available.

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