

## OPINION: Illegal Immigration Healthcare Costs Affect YOU

© By Elizabeth Lee Vliet, M.D.

The national spotlight is on Arizona for doing what the Federal government and previous Governor Napolitano refused to do: rein in an invasion of illegal aliens bankrupting our state. At an August 2009 healthcare Town Hall in Phoenix, legislators said that *more than half* of Arizona's 4 billion dollar budget deficit was the result of paying for three areas of services to *illegal* immigrants: education, healthcare, and incarceration.

What does illegal immigration have to do with *your* costs and your *access* to medical care when you need it?

Estimates are that 20-40% of *uncompensated* ("free") medical services are provided to people in the US illegally. The *actual* number may be much higher. Shockingly, hospitals and clinics don't ask about citizenship...a medical version of "Don't Ask, Don't Tell."

In both Tucson and Dallas where I have practiced medicine, hospitals are struggling under massive costs of uncompensated medical services for uninsured people who, by federal law, cannot be turned away for lack of insurance or ability to pay.

How much does this uncompensated care actually cost taxpayers?

The incredible answer: *no one knows*.

We only have "estimates" of the costs to taxpayers to treat illegal immigrants because hospitals and public health clinics do not ask for proof of citizenship before providing care.

What are consequences to taxpaying citizens?

1. Increased cost and reduced access to trauma care. Tucson has lost all but one Level I Trauma Center to serve all of southern Arizona, in large part due to massive, unsustainable losses from uncompensated care. Auto accidents involving overloaded vans of illegal aliens happen regularly in southern Arizona. Injured are flown by air ambulance to University Medical Center's Trauma Center and treated with state of the art care....*all at taxpayer expense*.
2. A registered nurse involved with the Pima County health system since the 1970's who must remain anonymous because of her role, said she has *never* seen any staff member at either El Rio Clinic or Pima County Health Department ask for proof of citizenship before providing free medical services (immunizations, Well Baby checks, food stamps, WIC services, birth control, and even elective abortions). Costs are paid by taxpayers. When funds are depleted, low income American citizens have fewer services and longer waits as a result.

3. This same RN also said: “I personally know Mexican men who married 16 year old girls, got them pregnant, brought them to Tucson for the baby to become a US citizen. They live in Mexico but come here for their health care. Taxpayers pay for this medical care many ways, at the Public Health Department, and with school nurses who provide care.”
4. Uncompensated medical services for illegal immigrants mean higher premiums for all of us due to cost shifting among all third party payers. To cover the deficits from “free” medical services they provide, the administration at University Physicians Health System Kino campus is analyzing how much to increase *employee* health insurance premiums as of July 1.
5. Obamacare cuts benefits to American citizens: \$500 billion in Medicare cuts and slashing the Medicare Advantage program. Medicare Advantage, chosen by one in five seniors, is the most popular plan for low and moderate income seniors, and covers about half of our Hispanic or African-American elderly. My patients on Medicare have worked and paid into the system over their working careers, yet these cuts mean less healthcare available to them now. We certainly cannot afford to cover those here *illegally*.
6. Hospitals in Tucson and Dallas also provide uncompensated (“free”) maternity services to pregnant women here illegally. Their babies then become US citizens entitled to all of the services available for low income American families – food stamps, WIC, immunizations, office visits, medications, etc. This drives up costs to all of us: higher premiums for private insurance companies, and higher taxes for government insurance like Arizona’s Medicaid (AHCCCS).
7. Professional estimates are that over *half* of the pregnant women served at Parkland Hospital in Dallas are in this country illegally. With over 16,000 deliveries a year, Parkland is one of the nation’s busiest maternity services with prenatal clinics for low income women to receive free prenatal care, nutrition, medication, birthing classes, child care classes, and free supplies (formula, diapers, bottles, car seats). Taxpayers pay the bills.

How many of these women are legal citizens and how many are not? No one knows. No one asks about citizenship.

It is significant that the 4 states with the highest number of *uninsured patients* are the southern Border States that also have the highest burden of *illegal immigrants*: California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.

The bottom line is that working, taxpaying, legal citizens are bearing the brunt of the failure of our government officials to document citizenship before providing medical services.

*How long before your medical care is delayed or denied because our health systems have collapsed from deficits due to uncompensated medical care?*

Arizona's massive deficits, greatly increased by healthcare services for illegals, is the canary in the mine, warning of a potential explosion that may collapse the system for all.

It's straight out of the Cloward-Piven playbook: destroy the system by overwhelming it. Your state – and your healthcare – may be next.

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See also “Health Reform by Cloward and Piven” by Dr. Richard Amerling:  
<http://www.aapsonline.org/newssoftheday/001027#more-1027>)

**Dr. Vliet speaks as an independent physician, not as an official spokesperson for any organization. Dr. Vliet has no financial ties to any health care system, pharmaceutical company, or health insurance plan. Her allegiance and advocacy is to and for patients. Her medical website is [www.herplace.com](http://www.herplace.com)**



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Dr. Vliet has appeared on FOX NEWS, Cavuto, Stuart Varney Show, Fox and Friends and syndicated radio shows across the country addressing these critical healthcare issues and is a passionate advocate for patients' freedom and maintaining free market, private options in healthcare. **For further information on healthcare reform, Dr. Vliet suggests 3 websites: [www.TakeBackMedicine.com](http://www.TakeBackMedicine.com), [www.JoinPatientsFirst.com](http://www.JoinPatientsFirst.com), and [www.PatientsUnitedNow.com](http://www.PatientsUnitedNow.com)**

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