New Guide Helps U.S. Health Professionals Protect Patients from Immigration Enforcement

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"Health Care and U.S. Immigration Enforcement: What Providers Should Know" from Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) and the National Immigration Law Center (NILC) provides guidance to clinicians and hospital administrators on how to defend the rights of patients and providers if U.S. immigration enforcement comes to health facilities

Following the Trump administration's decision to end guidance protecting "sensitive locations" such as health care facilities from immigration enforcement actions, a new guide published today provides information to health care workers about how to navigate the new enforcement landscape

while upholding ethical duties.

"Health Care and U.S. Immigration Enforcement: What Providers Should Know," jointly published by Physicians for Human Rights (PHR) and the National Immigration Law Center (NILC), offers guidance to clinicians on how to maintain trust with all patients regardless of immigration status. It also helps health professionals understand their legal rights and obligations, respond if immigration enforcement occurs in their health facility, and advocate for institutional policies that protect patient access to care.

"As the Trump administration expands its mass deportation campaign, hospitals and health facilities may be targeted for immigration raids. Health care professionals must be ready to protect health care access and defend the rights of patients, colleagues, and themselves. Our new guide will help equip health workers with knowledge and resources as they work to uphold their patients' health and rights. We encourage medical professionals to read the guide and share it widely with their colleagues," said Altaf Saadi, MD, MSc, PHR medical expert, neurologist at Massachusetts General Hospital, and assistant professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School, who contributed to the guide.

The guide notes that health care providers *"have both legal rights and ethical responsibilities to maintain spaces for your patients that are free from immigration enforcement within medical settings. Medical ethics underscore that health care workers' responsibility is to maintain strong therapeutic relationships with your patients."*

Recommendations to health providers include:

- **Proactively reassure patients**: Clearly communicate that immigration status does not affect a patient's right to receive medical care.
- **Do not ask about or document immigration status unless required by law:** As an ethical best practice, avoid asking for and documenting patients' immigration status.
- **Monitor and address rumors in the community**: If false reports of immigration enforcement presence spread, issue accurate information to patients and local networks in a timely manner to reduce cancellations and fear.
- **Share Know-Your-Rights information**: Display or distribute Know-Your-Rights information to help ensure that patients understand their rights across settings, including in medical spaces. Law enforcement, including Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), cannot enter private medical spaces without a judicial warrant.
- **Ensure institutional preparedness and protections against immigration enforcement:** All health facilities should have clear, written protocols for responding to immigration enforcement; staff should be trained to ensure that enforcement agents do not enter private spaces without verification from a designated staff member and a judicial warrant. Put up clear signage designating private versus public spaces.

“Health care professionals have the right and the responsibility to protect their patients. We created this guide to equip health care providers and administrators with the information they need to assert their rights and reassure their patients, because all of us are healthier and better off when we and our neighbors feel safe to seek the medical care we need,” said Matthew Lopas, JD, director of state advocacy & technical assistance at NILC.

In January, the Trump administration rescinded the ICE “sensitive locations” policy, which provided guidance to immigration enforcement agents to prevent action in or around locations like hospitals, schools, or places of worship. As of March 13, 2025 there have not been verified reports of ICE raids at hospitals, but the threat itself has already deterred some patients from seeking care. When community members avoid care due to fear of immigration enforcement, public and personal health suffers, including worsening outcomes from delayed treatment leading to more serious conditions.

The guide also offers recommendations to hospitals, health care institutions, and administrators, including:

- **Establish institutional policies regarding discussion and retention of immigration status:** Create and enforce a written policy recommending staff avoid inquiring about or documenting immigration status unless required by law.
- **Ensure facilities protect and invoke constitutional protections for the facility and patients**: Facilities should have protocols in place before any enforcement actions happen, grounded in the legal protections.
- **Evaluate your spaces and clearly designate and limit public access to areas of the facility**, establishing them as private and off-limits to individuals who are not patients or family/care partners.
- **Designate an on-call administrator, lawyer, or other individual who is**

trained to identify if there is a valid judicial warrant signed by a judge, and deny entry if presented with other documents, such as an administrative warrant issued by ICE or Customs and Border Patrol (CBP).

- **Adapt service delivery to reduce risk:** Expand telemedicine services to help patients avoid the risk of immigration enforcement, alongside other efforts that address immigrants' needs holistically.

The guide also provides background, policy context, legal information, and additional resources and support.

"As doctors, our oath is to 'do no harm.' Our obligation is to protect all of our patients, regardless of their immigration status. Our job is to provide health care to communities, not be agents of law and immigration enforcement. If ICE comes to health clinics, medical professionals should step up to honor this pledge and protect their patients. Even in the absence of immigration raids, we must address the growing fear in the immigrant community because we care for everyone as whole human beings," said Dr. Saadi.

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