

The High Cost of Undercounting

On July 21, the President issued a [memorandum](#) that calls for an unprecedented exclusion of undocumented immigrants from the decennial census data used for congressional apportionment, which determines how many seats in Congress each state is allocated. This memorandum marks the second attempt to erase undocumented residents from the census, and is the latest in [a series of policies](#) that unfairly target immigrants and their families and fuel a culture of fear. As pediatricians, public health researchers, and child health and policy experts, we are gravely concerned about the impact this significant undercount would have on children and families for the next decade, and strongly oppose the exclusion of any persons from the apportionment base.

The reapportionment of the House of Representatives – which occurs every ten years to reflect changes in state populations – has significant political implications. An accurate count maintains proportionate representation in Congress, which in turn allows the voices and needs of residents to be equitably heard and considered. The exclusion of undocumented immigrants will exacerbate racial and ethnic disparities and further dilute the political power of currently underrepresented communities. Moreover, this exclusion would preserve white political power and undermine political accountability to *all* residents.

In addition to the alarming direct impact this would have on the accurate Congressional representation of communities, we are deeply concerned about the culture of fear and marginalization that this memorandum perpetuates. Similar to concerns raised about the inclusion of a citizenship question in the census – a policy that was rejected by the Supreme Court last year – the issuance of this memorandum will likely deter immigrants, who are already traditionally undercounted, from participating in the census. This is particularly concerning for young children, a population with a [long-standing undercount](#) in decennial censuses even among non-immigrant families. Because census data inform how the federal government disperses roughly \$900 billion, lower response rates will dramatically lower the allocation of funds to state and local governments for social service, health, and education programs that are essential for the health and well-being of all children and their families. A lack of adequate funding to support critical programs will have a devastating impact on the health of all residents – particularly children and those living with low incomes. States with high rates of poverty rely on federal funding most; funding that does not correspond to actual population will spread thin critical support programs that serve and protect the health and well-being of children and families with low incomes, including Medicaid, programs within education – such as school meals and child care –, and housing. Moreover, because the Census happens only once every 10 years, the undercount would be held in place for a decade. For a young child, this could mean that their schools and other key programs upon which they rely would be underfunded all through their formative years of elementary schooling and into their middle school years. Fewer resources for those who need them most will, in turn, result in worse health and exacerbated economic instability. Policies of fear and punishment that target the immigrant community, such as the one laid out in this memorandum, is associated with toxic stress that will [compromise the health](#) of current and future generations.

The issuance of this memorandum, which stokes the flames of fear and mistrust, will ultimately suppress census participation and thwart accurate, inclusive enumeration that is essential for equitable



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representation in Congress and allocation of funding. Children's HealthWatch adamantly opposes the exclusion of any persons from the apportionment base and urges the Administration to rescind the memorandum immediately. Immigrant families are an integral part of our communities – they are our neighbors, coworkers, friends, and fellow parents. This policy will do harm to these families, as well as to our nation and all its children.

The decennial census is a powerful tool to build equitable political power through accurate apportionment and ensure our communities get the federal dollars they deserve. It is critically important now more than ever that **everybody** respond to the census to ensure its true purpose is protected – to fully count **all** people living in the United States.