



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Saturday, April 22, 2023

Contact: nazibah@waisn.org, lsmith@aclu-wa.org

Health Equity for Immigrants Advocates Commend WA Legislature for Expanding Health Coverage for Immigrants by 2024; Disappointed in Delay and Insufficient Funding

“A person’s right to health care access should not be dependent on their immigration status, the legislature’s budget, or politics.”

Olympia, WA - The state’s 2023-2025 biennium budget, released today, includes critical funding for affordable health coverage programs for immigrants. There are over 105,000 Washingtonians who do not have access to insurance because of their immigration status, leading to unattended medical problems, worse health outcomes, and mounting medical debt. The legislature’s final budget offers the opportunity for immigrants to access health coverage through the Cascade Care Exchange Program starting January 2024 and a Medicaid-like program starting July 2024, depending on income.

In response to the budget allocations, Catalina Velasquez, Deputy Director at the Washington Immigrant Solidarity Network, issued the following statement on behalf of the Health Equity for Immigrants Campaign’s coordinating committee:

“This is a pivotal moment for the state of Washington. The 2023-2025 biennium budget has secured both a Medicaid-like and an Exchange program that offers a foundational structure for us to continue to build upon. We thank our champions in the legislature, in moving Washington state to take this critical step toward funding health coverage programs for our immigrant communities in 2024. We also know this victory is a result of immigrant advocacy and the collective organizing work from directly impacted people, immigrant serving organizations, and our legislative champions. Thousands of uninsured immigrants in Washington who have been unable to access life-saving health care solely due to their citizenship status are another step closer to gaining access to this vital social safety net.

“However, we are disappointed that the funding for the Medicaid equivalent program at its current levels will leave continued gaps in coverage. Unfortunately, with inadequate funding of this program, we anticipate that tens of thousands Washingtonians will still lack health care access. In addition, the Medicaid-equivalent program will not be available until July 2024, delaying



access to needed health care for low-income community members by yet another six months. We look forward to working with legislators in both the House and the Senate to build upon these programs and continue to advance health equity for immigrants.

“As we celebrate this milestone and feel pride in our work to defend and protect the humanity of all immigrants in Washington, we also know our work is not over. All immigrants in Washington state need access to permanent, codified health coverage programs, at parity with what is available to citizens. These programs will benefit our communities and the state as our health is interconnected and healthy immigrants translate to healthy Washingtonians and a healthier and prosperous Washington state. However, our most vulnerable community members have gone without access to basic preventative care and follow up appointments, before and during the COVID-19 pandemic that claimed the lives of thousands and hospitalized nearly two million people in Washington state alone. We are excited for where we are headed and remain committed to working with lawmakers in future sessions to permanently ensure that all Washingtonians will have access to health care so that no one faces the pain and loss we have suffered before, during and post-pandemic times.

“A person’s right to health care access should not be dependent on their immigration status, the legislature’s budget, or politics. This is why we applaud this milestone as an important step toward correcting historical wrongs and uplifting the humanity and dignity of immigrants, who, like any other Washingtonian, fall ill and need access to health care. We are committed to continuing this work to secure adequate funding, implementation, and further codification into more permanent funding so healthcare access is guaranteed for all Washingtonians regardless of immigration status.”

###