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The Integration of Immigrants into American Society

Committee on Population

Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education

Health Status and Access to Care

- Compares the mortality and morbidity outcomes between immigrants and native-born.
- Describes the association between integration and health.
- Focuses on health care access.
- Discusses the Affordable Care Act and its consequences for immigrants.
- Describes the contributions of immigrants to health and health care

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Health and Illness Among Immigrants

- Immigrants have better infant, child, and adult health outcomes than the U.S.-born, in general, and US-born members from their own ethnic group.
- Immigrants, compared to the US-born, are less likely to die from cardiovascular disease and all cancers combined, have a lower incidence of all cancers combined, fewer chronic health conditions, lower infant mortality rates, lower rates of obesity, lower percentage who are overweight, fewer functional limitations, and fewer learning disabilities.
- Immigrants have lower prevalence of depression, the most common mental disorder in the world, and alcohol abuse.

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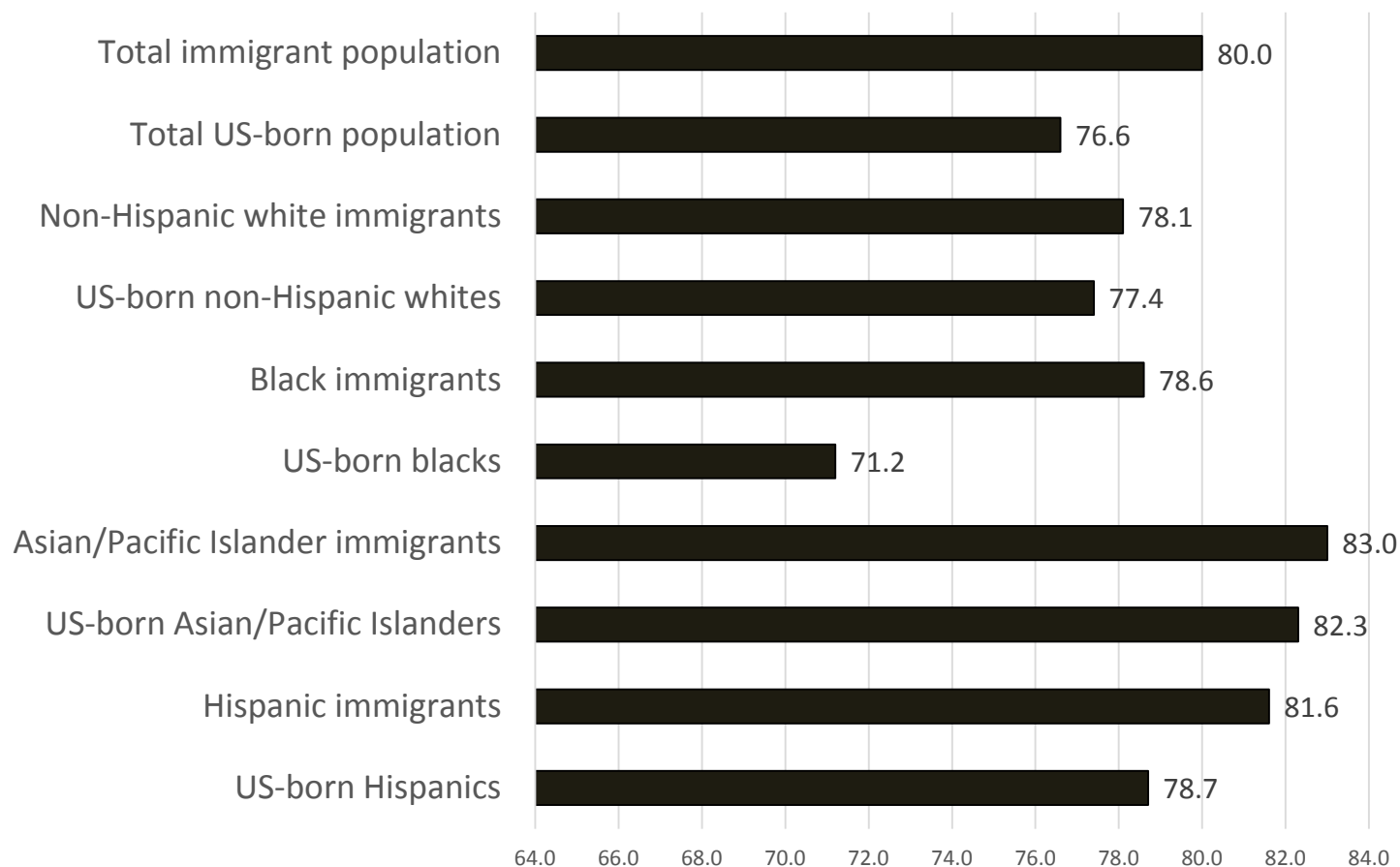
Life Expectancy is a Useful Measure to Summarize the Health Advantage of Immigrants

It measures the number of years a person is expected to live based on mortality statistics for a given time period. In this example, national birth and death records are linked to provide life expectancy data. The data are reported for people who were living in 1999-2001, includes death records up to 2010, and adjusts for age and gender (Singh et al, 2013).

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Life Expectancy at Birth (Average Lifetime in Years) by Race/Ethnicity and Immigrant Status



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Data from the US National Vital Statistics System, 1989-2001. (Singh et al., 2013)

What Accounts for the Health Advantage of Immigrants?

- Country differences: Immigrants may come from countries that have better health outcomes than the US.
- Selection effect: Healthier people immigrate.
- Salmon bias: Sicker people return to their home countries.
- Life style factors: Smoking contributes to deteriorating health over time
- Worksite environments: Poor work environments may contribute to poor health outcomes over time.

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Immigrant Integration and Health

- Length of residence: The longer immigrants reside in the US, rates of health problems increase including hypertension, chronic illnesses, smoking, diabetes, and heavy alcohol use.
- Generational status: The empirical literature suggests a pattern of declining health status after the immigrant generation. The pattern may differ depending on the health outcome and the ethnic group.
- Education: The education and health association is generally weaker for immigrants than for native-born.
- English speaking: English speaking proficiency is strongly associated with positive health.

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Access to Health Care

- Immigrants generally at a disadvantage compared to native born when it comes to receiving adequate and appropriate health care.
- Insurance, the lack of it or inadequate coverage, is a major barrier to accessing care.
- Health care settings may not have the appropriate staffing.
- Many immigrants may not speak English or may not speak it well enough to negotiate access to needed health services.

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Access to Health Care

- Public tensions around immigration may create a stigma about immigrants and lead to biases against immigrants among health care providers and staff and cause immigrants to avoid public settings.
- The safety net for health care continues to shrink and public programs for immigrants may not be available especially in new destinations.
- Undocumented immigrants may avoid contact with medical personnel and settings because they fear they will be reported to authorities and eventually deported.

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The Affordable Care Act and Immigrants

- Affordable Care Act included provisions that could help improve insurance coverage for millions of immigrants.
- A substantial share of the immigrant population, particularly the undocumented, will remain uninsured.
- A number of special barriers may exist for immigrants that make it harder for them to be aware of or to apply for health insurance, even if they are uninsured and eligible.
- While health insurance is important, by itself, it does not guarantee access to good quality health care.

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Two Way Exchange

- Cultural practices and diets that may produce better health such as reliance on fresh fruits and vegetables, few fatty foods, and lower reliance on fast foods and sugary drinks. Better practices that may be helpful to reduce stress such as goa, meditation, and tai-chi.
- Provide staff for the health care work force.
- Contribute to Medicare and positive impact on health care expenditures.

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