

Vital Stats

Health problems of migrant farm workers

While migrant farm workers play a vital role for Texas, they often have difficulty accessing health care. According to the Migrant Health Program, US Bureau of Primary Health Care, unsanitary working and housing conditions, as well as poverty and frequent mobility, often lead to health problems. These health conditions include infectious disease, nutritional health problems, dental disease, diabetes, hypertension, contact dermatitis, and pregnancy.

Migrants' access to primary health care is impeded by low literacy rates, as well as cultural and logistic barriers. Economic pressures, lack of sick leave, and the possibility of losing their jobs often cause migrant workers to postpone seeking health care unless their conditions become severe.

Some provisions for health care have been made through federal funding. The Bureau of Primary Health Care maintains 15 federally funded migrant health centers in Texas, predominately in South Texas, serving the migrant and seasonal farm worker population. The Bureau of Primary Health Care defines migrant farm workers as those principally employed in agriculture in the past 24 months and living temporarily in the United States.

Seasonal farm workers are similar to migrant farm workers, except they do not migrate. Statewide estimates made in 1993 by the Tomas Rivera Center in California indicate that the number of migrants and their dependents in Texas (370,815) is second only to California (700,233).

The estimated number of migrant users at the Texas migrant health centers has remained relatively stable from 1992 through 1995 (between 25,000 and 30,000 per year); however, federal funding earmarked specifically to Texas migrant health centers has decreased from almost \$8 million in 1992 to under \$6 million in 1995. A 1993 report by the National Advisory Council on Migrant Health, Bureau of Primary Health Care, Public Health Service, estimated that the average annual amount spent by federally funded health clinics in the United States was about \$100 per user and that the clinics only reach around 12% of migrants.

These medical and health indicators are presented by the Health Policy Institute at The University of Texas-Houston Health Science Center. For information, contact Russell D. Jones, MA, or Anna Fay Williams, PhD, at (713) 500-9485, or consult the institute's World Wide Web site (<http://utsph.sph.uth.tmc.edu/www/utsph/TS/HPI.htm>).

