



PUBLIC HEALTH

Impact Statement

Immigration Enforcement Is a Public Health Issue

February 11, 2026

The Illinois Public Health Association (IPHA) is deeply concerned about the escalation of federal immigration enforcement activities across the country. The immigration enforcement operations in Chicago, Minnesota, Portland, and, most recently in the state of Maine have grave consequences not only on public trust, but also on community safety, and public health.

Public health professionals have a deep understanding that these actions—such as raids, detentions, and deportations—disrupt care, trigger chronic fear, and cause severe, long-term physical and mental health issues for immigrants and their families, especially children. Enforcement actions create significant barriers to health care access, reducing trust in institutions and causing both immigrants and their families to avoid seeking medical treatment.

The public health impact of immigration enforcement actions include:

- **Decreased Health Care Access:** Fear of deportation causes many immigrants to avoid hospitals, clinics, and social services, leading to delayed treatment and worsening of health conditions.
- **Mental and Physical Health Impacts:** Increased surveillance and family separation are associated with higher rates of anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and adverse birth outcomes.
- **Detention Conditions:** Immigration detention facilities are often associated with poor nutrition, lack of proper medical care, and unsafe conditions, which can lead to rapid transmission of diseases and, in some cases, acute health crises.
- **Impact on Children:** The fear of losing a parent to deportation causes extreme distress in children, with some experiencing anxiety symptoms at an early age.
- **Workforce Disruptions:** As immigrants make up nearly 20% of the U.S. health care workforce, enforcement actions can threaten the stability of the health care system at our hospitals, clinics, and health centers.
- **Public Trust:** When enforcement actions occur near hospitals or health clinics, it violates the principle of safety for patients and erodes trust in medical institutions.

From a public health perspective, aggressive enforcement tactics have well-documented effects. Fear, anxiety, and trauma increase. People withdraw from public spaces. Families avoid routine activities. Individuals delay or avoid seeking health care, reporting crimes, or

accessing social services. These outcomes are not incidental — they are predictable and preventable.

Our country needs to move to a sensible and safe immigration enforcement system without the violence and uncertainty that has accompanied ICE operations to date. IPHA urges federal, state, and local leaders to recognize that immigration enforcement practices have real and measurable public health consequences. Protecting community well-being requires:

- Transparent and accountable investigations into all use-of-force incidents involving federal agents, with meaningful community oversight.
- Clear assurances that enforcement activities will not interfere with access to health care, education, or other essential services.
- Implementation of evidence-based de-escalation protocols that prioritize human life, safety, and dignity alongside legal responsibilities.
- Engagement with public health professionals before, during, and after enforcement actions to mitigate harm and preserve trust.

The Illinois Public Health Association urges the federal administration and all elected officials to mandate a commitment to due process and ensure increased oversight and transparency of any future ICE operations.

Resources:

Health care workers want ICE out of hospitals, and blue states are responding, February 8, 2026 (Stateline) <https://stateline.org/2026/02/09/health-care-workers-want-ice-out-of-hospitals-and-blue-states-are-responding/>

Federal Health Workers Warn DHS Is Driving a ‘Growing Public Health Crisis’ After Alex Pretti Shooting, January 26, 2026 (Time) <https://time.com/7357967/ice-border-patrol-public-health-crisis-trump-immigration/>

Health Care Providers Warn of Impacts of Increased ICE Presence at Health Care Facilities, January 22, 2026 (KFF) <https://www.kff.org/quick-take/health-care-providers-warn-of-impacts-of-increased-ice-presence-at-health-care-facilities/>

Consequences of Fear: How the Trump Administration’s Immigration Policies and Rhetoric Block Access to Health Care, April 2025 (Physicians for Human Rights) https://phr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Consequences-of-Fear_Research-Brief_PHR_April-2025.pdf

The Escalating War on Immigrants Is a Public Health Crisis, July 9, 2025 (AJPH) <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2025.308158>

Melanie Ferris, President-elect of the Board at the Minnesota Public Health Association talks about the public health repercussions of ICE operations in Minnesota in a Healthy Maine Talks podcast from the Maine Public Health Association. [Listen to Healthy Maine Talks here](#)