

Canada, US immigrants have less health care access than natives: study

3 September 2010, By Sylviane Duval

In spite of Canada's universal medical coverage, immigrants to that country have less access to health care than native-born Canadians for certain procedures, a new study finds. In fact, immigrants have about the same access as immigrants to the United States who depend on private health insurance or Medicaid and who have less access than native-born Americans.

Canada and the United States take in a large number of immigrants every year. Even though the health systems in each country differ vastly, the study gives policymakers on both sides of the border an opportunity to examine what works, what the other side is doing better and how to improve overall performance for its newest arrivals.

The study appears online in the journal *Health Services Research*.

Although raw data showed that immigrants to Canada had better access to medical and dental care than immigrants to the United States, most of the differences evaporated once researchers factored in demographics, [socioeconomic status](#) and insurance coverage. Nonetheless, some surprises remain: Fewer immigrants to Canada have Pap tests than native-born Canadians or immigrants to the United States, but fewer U.S. immigrants have a regular doctor or an annual health consultation compared to native-born Americans.

Lead study author Lydie Lebrun, of Johns Hopkins University, said that targeted Pap screening programs in the United States might be part of the reason. In addition, the United States receives more Hispanic immigrants and Canada receives more Asian immigrants. Hispanic immigrants have more children, bringing them into contact with the [health care system](#) more often.

Walter Wodchis, Ph.D., of the Health System Performance Research Network said the research

demonstrates that insurance alone cannot guarantee access to care. Aspects of medical care, such as the acceptability of Western medical procedures ? especially for such personal procedures as Pap tests ? could remain as important barriers and highlight the need for culturally sensitive approaches.

More information: Lebrun LA, Dubay LC. Access to primary and preventive care among foreign-born adults in Canada and the United States. *Health Services Research* online, 2010.

Source: Health Behavior News Service

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