

Immigration crackdown takes a toll on Chicagoland service workers' wellbeing

Immigration attorney Alexandra Ciullo starts her 60-hour work week combing through case files, attending zoom meetings and scheduling court dates.

However, her morning rarely passes without a call from a frantic client, fearful about how shifting immigration laws could affect their future in the U.S.

“Professionally, I am juggling terrified clients and their families and extremely volatile immigration case law and policy that is literally changing every day,” Ciullo said.

She said she expected tougher cases under the Trump administration but didn't anticipate that her client's financial, medical and emotional struggles would take on her own well-being.

President Donald Trump continues fulfilling [campaign promises](#) to defund and delegitimize services that support immigrant populations throughout the nation.

As part of his crackdown, [Trump put an end](#) to the [Health Benefits for Immigrant Adults](#) program at the beginning of the year. The program funded healthcare coverage for thousands of undocumented adults ages 42 to 64 in Illinois, according to the [Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services](#).

Just months later, Trump signed a sweeping budget [bill](#) that Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker warned could revoke Medicaid coverage for up to 330,000 people in the state, according to a [letter](#) he sent to Republican Reps. Mike Bost, Mary Miller and Darin LaHood.

Ciullo said that federal budget cuts to necessary healthcare and social services throughout the year have only added to her struggle.

“My mental health has worsened significantly since January,” she said.

Those cuts also hit close to home for Chicagoland mental health counselor Samantha Ramos.

About 70% of her clients are undocumented immigrants who rely on [Medicaid](#), according to Ramos.

Their insurance coverage and her clinic's payments have become unpredictable in recent months as a result of [mass firings](#) at the Department of Health and Human Services.

“We don’t really know when we’re going to get our next check from Medicaid,” Ramos said.

She said financial uncertainty adds to the stress she and her colleagues already experience in the office, making them more susceptible to burnout.

The World Health Organization defines [burnout](#) as a syndrome caused by persistent workplace stress, marked by exhaustion, helplessness and low productivity.

About 40% of Chicago mental health workers reported feeling burnt in 2024, according to a Cook County Health Department [study](#)

Ramos said some clinicians she supervises turn to binge drinking to cope with burnout.

“When you try to numb yourself instead of releasing the load, you are going to burn out quicker,” she said.

Historian Jennifer Cárcamo said Ramos’ experience reflects a broader trend.

“What Trump’s done has exacerbated the system that has allowed him to do what he is doing,” she said.

Medical clinician Elise Ogden said this pattern is not limited to mental health workers.

Ogden works 12-hour shifts at [Clínica Nuevas Raíces](#), a volunteer-based health clinic in Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood. There, she said she mostly sees patients who are Spanish-speaking and undocumented.

She said ICE raids have increased since Trump signed [“One Big Beautiful Bill”](#) in July.

The bill added \$165 billion to the Department of Homeland Security, providing funding for 10,000 more immigration agents and 80,000 new detention beds. It also expanded authority for local police to aid in deportations, according to United States Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem.

Many patients are now too afraid to visit the clinic which has cut off vital connections with providers, said Ogden.

“That is devastating to us because we build relationships with people. That’s what makes us different from the standard healthcare system,” she said.

Pilsen community organizer Diego Morales said the fear of deportation has spread far beyond the clinic.

Just blocks away, Morales said he has increasingly noticed more ICE agents outside of his house.

“I’ve seen neighbors deported off the street, and you feel so helpless about it,” he said.

To resist, Morales trains volunteers to spot and track ICE agents to help prevent deportation raids through Migra Watch, a program run by [Pilsen Unidos Por Nuestro Orgullo](#).

However, the unpredictable timing of those raids means he must stay on call at all hours, which he said strained his health.

“I definitely used to eat more regularly. I would go to the gym. I’ve been unable to keep that up,” he said.

He said actively serving the immigrant community feels overwhelming amidst federal pushback. Still, determination persists among his colleagues, neighbors and fellow providers.

“We are very strong, and we can fight, and we can win when we’re together,” he said.

“It’s in our nature as humans, and it’s in our nature as Latinos,” he said.

##