

# Bulosan Center for Filipinx Studies

## *COVID-19 and the Filipino American Community*

with focus on California and highlights on Greater Sacramento



### *Key Facts*

The Filipino American undocumented population for the state of California is an estimated **64,130 and 75,790.**

**18%** of the nurse population in California is Filipino

Among API groups, Filipinos (at 24%) comprise the majority of those working and struggling with poverty.

**14%** of APIs lack health insurance in the state of California.

Filipinos suffer a greater prevalence for specific kinds of respiratory issues



*Filipina nurses speaking at a recent Bulosan Center event*

This report tracks the potential impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the Filipino American community. Key factors that make the Filipino American community vulnerable, as compared to other Asian American-Pacific Islander groups, are its undocumented population and the employment of Filipino Americans in sectors especially impacted by COVID-19. The Bulosan Center is developing a short survey in collaboration with its state-wide network of community-based organizations to collect granular data on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on the community.

### *The Undocumented Filipinx Population*

Undocumented status puts people at greater risk of infection and death in situations like the COVID-19 crisis. Undocumented individuals and their families tend to live in overcrowded conditions, may be less likely to be insured or seek medical attention, or lack the linguistic and cultural resources to access and assess public health and other relevant information.<sup>1</sup> News reports confirm this dynamic is similar across immigrant communities during the current pandemic.<sup>2</sup> Almost 1.5 million Filipinos live in California, , or approximately

26.5% of the state’s Asian population.<sup>3</sup> Filipino Americans are the largest Asian American ethnic group in the state.<sup>4</sup> The same is true for the greater Sacramento region, where Filipino Americans numbered at 74,000, having grown 85% from 2000-2010. Neighboring San Joaquin county saw a 65% growth in the Filipino American population ranking it second after Sacramento County with the largest number of Filipino Americans.<sup>5</sup> Consequently, the Filipino American undocumented

population for the state of California is likely to be between 64,130 and 75,790. We can roughly estimate the number of undocumented Filipinx migrants in Sacramento and neighboring counties based on their proportion to both the undocumented population and the API population with Sacramento County totaling 1,946, Yolo County at 335 and Sonoma County at 700.<sup>6</sup> It should also be noted that many more Filipinos, not counted in these estimates, likely possess tenuous legal status, that is, they are likely to fall out of status and be rendered undocumented. For instance, during the Marcos dictatorship of the 1970s-

80s, there are likely many Filipinos fleeing the current Duterte administration. Since they are unable to seek political asylum due to string diplomatic relations between the US and Philippines, many may be seeking entry into the United States as “tourists” with the ultimate aim of overstaying their visas.<sup>7</sup> As a consequence of the Philippine government’s maturing “labor brokerage” apparatus, many Filipinos are working as “guest workers” (teachers, hospitality workers, etc.) in the United States, where many may find themselves out of work (and therefore out of status) during this crisis.<sup>8</sup>

## *COVID-19 Exposure for Health Workers*

Filipino health care workers are on the frontlines in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic. They are ubiquitous in California’s hospitals. When it comes to nurses, nearly 18% of the nurse population in California is Filipino. Numerous studies indicate that Filipinos are overrepresented among the nurse population as compared to other ethnic/racial groups and in comparison to both the patient and general population in California.<sup>9</sup> Beyond the nursing profession,

Filipinos are found in greater numbers as compared to other APIs in health care support occupations. Almost one third of employed Filipinos, according to one study,<sup>10</sup> are employed in these kinds of jobs. Given recent media reports about COVID-19 exposure by health care workers, Filipino health care workers and their families, and by extension the Filipino community at large, are at greater risk for COVID-19 exposure as compared to other groups.<sup>11</sup>

## *Poverty and Economic Insecurity*

According to data from the 2019 AAPI California Workers Survey, Filipinos make up 24% of API population who struggle with poverty in the state.<sup>12</sup> The San Joaquin Valley (50%), has the highest proportion of APIs with poor or low income status. Recall that Filipinos are among the largest APIs groups in that region and thus likely comprise a great number of the

population who are working class or impoverished. Even before COVID-19, 70% of Filipinos in California reported experiencing at least one of the following problems including having difficulty paying their rents or mortgages, having to cut back on food expenses to save money, or not having enough money to pay bills among other challenges.<sup>13</sup>

**BULOSAN CENTER**  
FOR FILIPINO STUDIES  
UC Davis, Asian American Studies



### *About the Center*

The Bulosan Center for Filipinx Studies continues Carlos Bulosan’s legacy of uplifting the voices of the most marginalized in the Filipino community in the United States and the diaspora. This is being done through community-engaged research that broadly disseminates knowledge about Filipinos for the purpose of advancing our rights and welfare.

*For more information, visit us online at:*

[bulosancenter.ucdavis.edu](http://bulosancenter.ucdavis.edu)

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# Pre-Existing Respiratory Issues and Lack of Health Insurance

Several studies find that Filipinos suffer a greater prevalence for specific kinds of respiratory issues, making them especially vulnerable should they contract COVID-19<sup>14</sup>. Filipinos (along with Pacific Islanders) have especially high lifetime asthma prevalence, asthma mortality rates, and Medi-Cal asthma hospitalization rates according to a study by the California Department of Public Health.<sup>15</sup> Further, compared to non-Hispanic Whites, Filipinos had a higher prevalence of fair or poor health, being obese or overweight, and having high blood pressure, diabetes, or asthma.<sup>16</sup>

In terms of health insurance coverage, 14% of APIs lack health insurance in the state of California.<sup>17</sup> Sacramento County, meanwhile, has one of the largest medically underserved Asian American and NHPI populations in the country, according to the Association of Asian Pacific Community Health Organizations.<sup>18</sup> Again, given the high numbers of Filipinos in the state of California and the greater Sacramento region, we can anticipate that Filipinos who contract COVID-19 will not be able to get proper medical attention due to their lack of health care coverage.

## Conclusion

This research only provides a snapshot of the impact of COVID-19 on the Filipino community with a focus on the most vulnerable groups: the undocumented, the poor, those with pre-existing medical conditions, those who lack health insurance and health care workers. The Bulosan Center is pushing out a survey that assesses the crisis as it exacerbates other problems and issues faced by the Filipino community (e.g. housing insecurity, lack of language access, remittances to love ones, etc.) and the ways in which it impacts other employment sectors (service sector workers, small-business owners, etc.). However, it is hoped that this initial research brief can help bolster state-wide efforts, as well as efforts in the greater Sacramento region, to increase the visibility of Filipino Americans' distinctive struggles and experiences during this current crisis.



1. Truman, Benedict I et al. "Pandemic influenza preparedness and response among immigrants and refugees." *American journal of public health* vol. 99 Suppl 2, Suppl 2 (2009):S278-86. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2008.154054

2. Gies, Heather, and John Washington. "Maybe If I Had Papers, It Would Have Been Different': Undocumented During a Pandemic." *The Nation*, 25 Mar. 2020, www.thenation.com/article/politics/undocumented-coronavirus/.

Kim, Catherine. "Low-Income Immigrants Are Afraid to Seek Health Care amid the Covid-19 Pandemic." *Vox*, 13 Mar. 2020, www.vox.com/identities/2020/3/13/21173897/coronavirus-low-income-immigrants.

3. As with most Census figures related to ethnic and racial minorities, this is likely an undercount. This is something even the Census acknowledges: "Census Bureau Releases Estimates of Undercount and Overcount in the 2010 Census - 2010 Census - Newsroom - U.S. Census Bureau." *Census.gov*, 22 May 2012, www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010\_census/cb12-95.html.

4. *A Community of Contrasts Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in California*. A Community of Contrasts Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in California, Asian American Center for Advancing Justice www.advancingjustice-alc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Communities\_of\_Contrast\_California\_2013-1.pdf.

5. Ibid. p. 28.

6. See https://www.ppic.org/publication/undocumented-immigrants-in-california/ for estimates

of the number of undocumented immigrants by county in California. Please keep in mind that these numbers are conservative, and rough estimates. Nobody has done the work of doing close analyses of the API undocumented population by county, and estimates are based on assumptions that may or may not hold true. For example, the proportion of undocumented immigrants coming from Mexico has significantly decreased over the course of the past decade, but despite the increase in overall Asian migration, much of the growth in the undocumented population is attributed to Central American countries (Passel, Jeffrey S., and D'Vera Cohn. "Mexicans Decline to Less than Half the U.S. Unauthorized Immigrant Population for the First Time." *Pew Research Center*, Pew Research Center, 12 June 2019, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/06/12/us-unauthorized-immigrant-population-2017-.)

7. Hing, Bill Ong. *Deporting our souls: Values, morality, and immigration policy*. Cambridge University Press, 2006; see also https://filipinostudies.wordpress.com/2012/02/02/resisting-homeland-security-organizing-against-unjust-removals-of-u-s-filipinos/.

8. Francisco, Valerie, and Robyn Rodriguez. "Coming to America: The Business of Trafficked Workers." *Legislating a New America: The Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of 1965 and Its Contribution to American Law and Society* (2014): 274-91.

9. Spetz, Joanna, et al. "California Board of Registered Nursing 2016 Survey of Registered Nurses." *HealthForce Center at UCSF*, 1 Nov. 2017, healthforce.ucsf.edu/publications/california-board-registered-nursing-2016-survey-registered-nurses.

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Board of Registered Nursing." 9 Oct. 2013.

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11. Boburg, Shawn, et al. "Covid-19 Hits Doctors, Nurses and EMTs, Threatening Health System." *The Washington Post*, WP Company, 17 Mar. 2020, www.washingtonpost.com/health/covid-19-hits-doctors-nurses-emts-threatening-health-system/2020/03/17/f21147e8-67aa-11ea-b313-df458622c2cc\_story.html.

12. Ramakrishnan, Karthick, et al. "The Working Lives and Struggles of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in California". AAPI Data and PRRI, 2019.

13. Ibid.

14. "What to Know About Asthma and COVID-19" *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 17 Mar. 2020, www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/asthma.html?CDC\_AA\_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fspecific-groups%2Fasthma.html.

15. "Asthma in California: Accompanying Slides." *California Burning, Environmental Health Investigations Branch, California Department of Public Health*. May 2013.

16. Adia, Alexander C., et al. "Health Conditions, Outcomes, and Service Access Among Filipino, Vietnamese, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean Adults in California, 2011-2017." *AJPH Surveillance*, vol. 110, no. 4, Apr. 2020.

17. *A Community of Contrasts Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in California*. A Community of Contrasts Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in California, Asian American Center for Advancing Justice www.advancingjustice-alc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Communities\_of\_Contrast\_California\_2013-1.pdf.

18. Ibid. p.35

Help us collect more data on the Filipinx American community by participating in the Filipin[x]s Count! The Filipinx/Filipinx-American Health and Well-Being Survey

[tinyurl.com/filcount](https://tinyurl.com/filcount)