

# Illegal immigrants on welfare: fact or fiction?

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Illegal immigrants swarm into our country and quickly jump on the welfare rolls. They cost hard-working U.S. citizens billions and billions of dollars in taxes because of this subsidy.

That's a familiar, easy charge leveled by critics of illegal immigration. But is it fact or fiction?

It's actually a myth, according to the Congressional Research Service, the investigative arm of Congress. This point is highlighted as one of the ["top five immigration myths of the campaign season,"](#) a list put out by the [American Immigration Lawyers Association.](#)

Here's their look at welfare:

**MYTH #3:** The nation spends billions of dollars on welfare for undocumented immigrants.

**FACTS:** To the contrary, undocumented immigrants are not eligible to receive any "welfare" benefits and even legal immigrants are severely restricted in the benefits they can receive.

As the Congressional Research Service points out in a 2007 report, undocumented immigrants, who comprise nearly one-third of all immigrants in the country, are not eligible to receive public "welfare" benefits -- ever.

Legal permanent residents (LPRs) must pay into the Social Security and Medicare systems for approximately 10 years before they are eligible to receive benefits when they retire. In most cases, LPRs can not receive SSI, which is available only to U.S. citizens, and are not eligible for means-tested public benefits until 5 years after receiving their green cards.

A 2007 analysis of welfare data by researchers at the Urban Institute reveals that less than 1 percent of households headed by undocumented immigrants receive cash assistance for needy families, compared to 5 percent of households headed by native-born U.S. citizens.

A 2007 analysis of U.S. Census data by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities makes clear that it is the U.S.-born, U.S.-citizen children of undocumented immigrants who are eligible for programs such as Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The analysis found that, between 1995 and 2005, the share of low-income, non-citizen immigrant children (either undocumented or legally present) who received Medicaid or SCHIP dropped from 36 percent to 30 percent.