

# [***Obamacare Is a Lifeline for Immigrants Like Me | Opinion***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BM3-TC81-DY68-1004-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** Access to health care transformed my life and the lives of countless others.

**Body**

This year [*21.3 million Americans chose Affordable Care Act (ACA) marketplace coverage*](https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/historic-213-million-people-choose-aca-marketplace-coverage) during the open enrollment period. About a fourth of those were new to the marketplace and 16 million Americans renewed their coverage. Despite its popularity and the fact that it's a lifeline for millions of people, former President [*Donald Trump is threatening to terminate it*](https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/-trump-health-care-policy-rcna143919).

This is exactly why I work in ***politics***—to ensure the representation of underrepresented and marginalized voices. The fight against the dismantling of ACA, colloquially known as Obamacare, is personal. Not just because I'm an immigrant from a low-income community who knows what it's like to live without insurance, but because I worked in the White House during the Obama administration during the ACA's 2014 roll-out. I've seen how important this work is to [*Democrats*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/democrats?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships) and specifically to President [*Joe Biden*](https://www.newsweek.com/topic/joe-biden?utm_source=Synacor&utm_medium=Attnet&utm_campaign=Partnerships).

Back then, I was insecure and felt inadequate. I was surrounded by people who boasted college credentials from some of the top schools in the nation. I didn't finish college. That wasn't even the worst of it. My family faced a number of hardships just before I was set to graduate from high school. This threw me into survival mode. I became a college dropout. My only goal was to make it through each day. This went on for four years. I was 19 working for the United Food and Commercial Workers Union when I had health insurance for the first time in my life.

Fighting for basic human rights is what put me on a path to the White House. It was in my role as associate director of Latino and immigration affairs where I was asked to devise the plan to help Latinos understand the importance of the program and get them to sign-up for it. I struggled with basic memo writing in relation to my peers—the task of creating a successful roll-out plan felt like a herculean task.

This is where I see the importance of diversity—in age, gender, race, and socioeconomic status. It was my boss, a Latina (Julie Chávez Rodriguez), who saw me for who I was. She encouraged me to step into my power and allow my lived experience to be as authoritative as a college degree. I was the only individual in that room who grew up without health insurance. I was also the only person with a family still uninsured. I know firsthand what it's like to treat a pharmacist like a makeshift doctor, to pay in cash for doctor visits, or to avoid primary care because past bills are due.

I leaned in and helped write the plans still being used today to help people obtain health insurance. The memo took me hours, but it was worth it. I want people to know that it was a Mexican immigrant whose first language is Spanish, who grew up uninsured, who fought to make sure their voices were heard so they wouldn't have to live their life being uninsured.

This is exactly what I told then-Vice President Joe Biden when I was assigned to brief him for a Latino town hall on ACA 10 years ago. He responded in the affirmative with a snap of his fingers and an "I got it!" He could see Obamacare's value and importance to helping people live healthy lives. In President Biden's first term, he took on insurance companies to lower the price of insulin and prescription drugs; and fought to save Medicare, Medicaid, and the ACA, which did not surprise me.

That moment in my life working on the ACA was pivotal. It also has a special significance in relation to the status quo. My boss who kept me going when I felt like I wasn't smart enough to be doing this work was Julie Chávez Rodríguez, now the campaign manager for President Joe Biden's 2024 re-election campaign. Representation matters and so do diverse life experiences. Latinos have been a priority for Democrats since day one and continue to be so at a time when people like Trump work to dismantle systems that help marginalized communities.

Last year, my mom became a breast cancer survivor. Her hospital bills were well over six figures. Without Medicare her healthy victory would have been overshadowed with the news of financial ruin. I no longer work in the White House but the threats against ACA continue. I'll stay in the fight for as long as needed.

Access to health care transformed my life and the lives of countless others. For my mother, the ACA wasn't just a policy; it was a beacon of hope, the first step toward a healthier, more secure future. Joe Biden's unwavering commitment to safeguarding the ACA is paramount. As president, he champions health care as a fundamental right, prioritizing its protection and expansion. His dedication resonates with individuals like me, who understand firsthand the transformative impact of accessible health care.

The ACA isn't just legislation; it's a lifeline for millions. Its preservation ensures that no one endures the hardships of being uninsured.

*Jorge Neri was an appointee in the Barack Obama administration and served on President Joe Biden's campaign and transition team. He is a political strategist, Mexican immigrant, and advocate for the voting power of Latinos.*

*The views expressed in this article are the writer's own.*

[*Link to Image*](https://d.newsweek.com/en/full/2366166/obamacare-sign-seen.jpg)

**Graphic**

An Obamacare sign is seen

Joe Raedle/Getty Images

An Obamacare sign is seen outside of the Leading Insurance Agency, which offers plans under the Affordable Care Act (also known as Obamacare) on Jan. 28, 2021, in Miami, Fla.

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