

COVER | AGE

a film by Set Hernandez Rongkilyo
a California Immigrant Policy Center production

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24 mins | USA | 2019

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LOGLINE

Confronting the healthcare exclusion of elderly undocumented immigrants in California, two immigrant leaders (one a caregiver, the other a policy advocate) champion the movement to expand healthcare coverage for everyone in the Golden State.

SUMMARY

The Affordable Care Act explicitly denies undocumented immigrants access to healthcare. While laws in California have now made healthcare available for undocumented young people, undocumented adults continue to be excluded. COVER/AGE follows an elderly caregiver and a policy advocate in the campaign to expand healthcare to include all people, regardless of immigration status or age.

SYNOPSIS

COVER/AGE examines the lack of healthcare access for undocumented immigrants in California, and how two undocumented individuals are advocating to fight this exclusion. One protagonist is Emma, an elderly Pilipina caregiver, who has spent over a decade providing care for others. Over the course of the film, we see Emma get ready early in the morning to care for an elderly patient who is not much older than her. Ironically, while Emma was providing care to insured, ailing patients, she herself was battling both illness and the U.S. health system which excluded her simply because of her immigration status. Emma's story highlights how undocumented domestic workers are integrated in the healthcare industry, but they themselves don't have access to the care they deserve in order to maintain their own wellness.

The other protagonist is Héctor (they/them), one of the young adult founders of the immigrant health movement in California. Through the film, we learn of their important activism and organizing, from mobilizing around healthcare with legislators in the state capitol to training other undocumented immigrants to advocate for themselves. While Héctor is engaged in the bigger realm of legislative transformation, their personal journey unveils a deeper analysis of what health justice means: Beyond the need to visit the doctor's office, access to wellness for all communities must include a more holistic healing that recognizes traumas communities have accrued from their lived experiences.

As Emma and Héctor navigate the complex health policy system, critical gaps in a health system that excludes undocumented migrants reveal the profound and harmful impact on the community. At the same time, steadfast organizing by community leaders and advocates underscores the resilience of immigrants in the face of these challenges. As the conversation around universal healthcare continues to gain momentum on the national stage, this film highlights the urgency of expanding healthcare access to undocumented people by centering the unwavering voices of immigrant health justice leaders.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

In 2015, I found myself in my first ever full-time job working on the Health4All campaign to help pass Health4All kids in California. Although the campaign's target group that year was children, the vision for the Health4All campaign has always been to expand healthcare for all people, regardless of their immigration status or age.

The film's protagonist, Héctor Plascencia, and myself go way back. I remember how we would go visit the Central Valley to better understand the health experiences of migrant farmworkers in the grapefields of Arvin, CA. How we would participate in events with LA-based clinics supporting healthcare access for trans migrants and communities. How we would work with undocumented young adults to develop resource arounds Medi-Cal access for those fortunate enough to receive DACA.

Fast forward 5 years, it feels like full circle to be able to work on this film, but we also carry the heaviness in understanding that we are here today facing a particularly challenging moment in our lifetimes. I, among many other undocumented comrades have lost, loved ones over the last few years due to lack of access to healthcare because of their immigration status. I think about Tita Maddie, whose name appears in the dedication at the end of the film. She advocated for Health4All as she herself was battling cancer. I think about our comrade Aide Arana, one of our Health4All leaders whom we lost in 2019, just the day before we premiered COVER/AGE. This moment when not just the state of California, not just this country, but the whole world is facing a pandemic, we recognize how sickness does not discriminate. So why should healthcare?

In her book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, the indigenous Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai-Smith writes: "The remembering of a people relates not so much to an idealized remembering of a golden past but more specifically to the remembering of a painful past and, importantly, people's responses to that pain." COVER/AGE is a film that highlights how undocumented people, are not merely survivors of the circumstances we face, but also how we are leading in the movements that impact us AND how we ourselves are telling our own stories to empower our community. This film highlights the health4all campaign by featuring the leadership of two amazing migrant leaders: Héctor Plascencia who is one of the founding leaders of the immigrant health justice movement in California, and Emma, a home care worker, an organizer, a grandmother.

This country is always so ready to take the labor of undocumented people, whether it's farmworkers who supply the food in our groceries or the homecare workers like Emma caring for the elderly. But when it comes to upholding their dignity and providing them with basic worker's rights and healthcare, it's like pulling teeth. We can no longer rely on gofundme pages and charity as a form of health insurance. It never was a good enough remedy to begin with. Now more than ever, what we need is action rooted in solidarity to build better infrastructures so that all people have access to the care they deserve whether it's during a pandemic or not. Whether they are old or not-so-old, a citizen or undocumented.

THE PROTAGONISTS



EMMA is a breast cancer survivor and caregiver who has over a decade's worth of experience serving the elderly and has taken on some of the most heart-wrenching care work with compassion, understanding and patience. Her hard work paid off as she was honored with the Caregiver of the Year award in the Home Care Rising Summit in 2014 and in 2017 received the Outstanding Caregiver award from the agency she worked for. Originally from the Philippines, she is an active worker leader and has organized with domestic workers across the U.S. (many of whom are immigrants) in addition to being a professional home care worker. Emma is a mother and grandmother who enjoys spending her free time eating out with friends, shopping, and video chatting

with her family abroad.

QUOTES FROM EMMA:

“As caregivers, we're the ones that provide care, but we have a hard time getting care.”

“What's going to happen to us if we get sick, where do we go? We don't have insurance or money. Especially for us immigrants, where do we go?”

“We should fight to have health insurance for all people, not just for the undocumented, but especially for seniors.”



HÉCTOR PLASCENCIA (they/them/we/us) was raised in La Puente, California by powerful Latina cis-women. As a transgender, undocumented, queer sister, daughter and beloved bridge builder, Héctor's identities and privileges shape their work and holistic approach to social justice. Grounded in community centered transformation, Héctor is guided by the belief that impacted people must be active in all aspects of movement development and implementation. Their natural progression from immigrant rights organizer to health justice and trans policy advocate led them to center health and healing as focal points of movement building and sustainability. Beyond movement magic, Héctor loves to dance, visit the woods and pays homage to their

trans-cestors by continuing to exist. 

@hectorplascencia_  @hctr_plascencia

QUOTES FROM HÉCTOR:

“What we fear is that within the Health4All advocacy fight, it would stall at young adults and inhibit us from moving forward to reaching our elders.”

“We want to center the lives of our undocu-elders. They're our most humble, our most vulnerable, and in the most need.”

“As farmworkers, domestic workers, generally the most intensive type of labor in this country is through our undocumented elders. And you can just imagine the level of need they have for medical attention.”

“Our elders have given so much of themselves to this country their labor and their work.”

#HEALTH4ALL CAMPAIGN

Since 2014, California has reduced its number of uninsured residents from 7 million to 3 million people thanks to the implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) and additional state reforms. Despite this progress, the ACA explicitly and unjustly excludes undocumented immigrants from health coverage through federally funded programs, including Medi-Cal. The Health4All Coalition was formed by the California Immigrant Policy Center and Health Access California to advocate for removing these exclusions based on immigration status.

The coalition's years of advocacy have resulted in a number of wins. In 2016 California invested in providing full-scope Medi-Cal to all low-income children, regardless of immigration status. Since then, "Health4All Kids" has resulted in the successful enrollment of over 250,000 undocumented children in life-saving healthcare. In 2019, Governor Gavin Newsom signed a state budget plan that funded a further expansion of Medi-Cal to include low-income undocumented young adults ages 19-25, which will be effective January 1, 2020.

However, older undocumented adults—our parents and siblings, friends and neighbors, taxpayers and workers in our economy—remain locked out of comprehensive healthcare, making them the largest population in California with no health insurance. Any effort towards universal coverage, whether in California or nationally, will not be successful until everyone, regardless of status, has access to care. The #Health4All Campaign continues to fight for health care for all Californians.

#HEALTH4ALL CAMPAIGN TIMELINE

- 2010** Affordable Care Act is signed into law, expanding healthcare access for millions of Americans and non-citizens, while excluding undocumented immigrants.
- 2014** Health4All legislation is introduced for the first time in California state legislature.
- 2015** SB 75 (Lara), aka Health4All Kids, is signed into law, expanding Medi-Cal eligibility for all income-eligible minors ages 18 and younger in California, regardless of immigration status.
- 2016** Health4All Kids is implemented, eventually leading to over 250,000 children (and counting) enrolled into Medi-Cal.
- 2018** SB 974 (Lara) to allow undocumented elders ages 65 and older to enroll in Medi-Cal and AB 2965 (Arambula) to do so for young adults ages 19-25 garner widespread support among the state legislature but ultimately do not pass due to Governor Jerry Brown's unwillingness to fund the expansions through the state budget.
- 2019** Health4All Young Adults passes with support from newly elected Governor Gavin Newsom, expanding Medi-Cal eligibility for undocumented immigrants age 25 and younger and making California the first state in the U.S. to extend coverage to undocumented adults. Despite momentous grassroots mobilization in support of SB 29 (Durazo), the proposal to include undocumented seniors age 65 and older did not pass this year.
- 2020 & Beyond** The fight to expand healthcare access for all, regardless of immigration status and age, continues both in the state of California and at the national level.

FILMMAKER



SET HERNANDEZ RONGKILYO (director, producer, editor, writer, cinematographer) is an undocumented immigrant filmmaker and community organizer whose roots come from Bicol, Philippines. They are the fruit of their parents' sacrifices, their siblings' resilience, and their community's nurturing. Set envisions a filmmaking landscape that centers equity and abundance, where all artists have the resources to thrive using the unique skill sets they embody.

Set's short films have been televised, featured, and awarded in film festivals across the U.S. As part of the inaugural cohort of the Disruptors Fellowship by Joey Solloway's 5050by2020 and the Center for Cultural Power, Set is developing a half-hour, TV comedy pilot about the undocumented experience. Set also directed and produced the short documentary "COVER/AGE" (2019) about healthcare expansion for undocumented adults. They served as Impact Producer for the art activation "In Plain Sight" by renowned artists Cassils and rafa esparza, as well as for PJ Raval's "Call Her Ganda" which premiered at the 2018 Tribeca Film Festival.

Since 2010, Set has been organizing around migrant justice issues from education equity to deportation defense. They are the co-founder of the Undocumented Filmmakers Collective which tackles the inequities that undocumented immigrants face in the media industry. They are a 2020 Disruptors Fellow, 2019 Docs in Action Fund Recipient, 2018 Firelight Impact Producer Fellow, 2017 Soros Justice Fellow, among others. They have spoken about people-centered filmmaking on panels across the country including Sundance Film Festival 2020, Allied Media Conference 2018, and served in the LA Asian Pacific Film Festival 2019 Awards Jury.

CREDITS

Featuring

Emma
Héctor Plascencia

Directed, Produced, Written, Edited, and Cinematography by
Set Hernandez Rongklyo

Produced by

Almas Sayeed
Shervan Sebastian
Sarah Dar
Jyotswaroop Bawa

Co-Producers

Denzel Tongue
Carolina Gamero
Whelma Cabanawan

Executive Director, California Immigrant Policy Center
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FILM FESTIVALS



PRESS & ARTICLES

COLORLINES

PUBLISHED BY



New Doc Reveals Fight to Insure Undocumented Workers

In the battle to make healthcare a right for all, "COVER/AGE" spotlights an elderly worker who cares for others with no protection for herself.

N. JAMIYLA CHISHOLM | APR 29, 2020 11:45AM ET



"COVER/AGE" spotlights Emma, who has worked with the elderly for over a decade, as she fights for her own healthcare. Photo Credit: Courtesy of Set Hernandez Rongkilyo

The filmmaker, [Set Hernandez Rongkilyo](#), agreed, noting the need for unification among grassroots organizers and organizations around this issue, in a press statement:

This country is always so ready to take the labor of undocumented people, whether it's farmworkers who supply the food in our groceries or the homecare workers like Emma caring for the elderly. But when it comes to upholding their dignity and providing them with basic worker's rights and healthcare, it's like pulling teeth. We can no longer rely on Gofundme pages and charity as a form of health insurance. It never was a good enough remedy to begin with. Now more than ever, what we need is action rooted in solidarity to build better infrastructures so that all people have access to the care they deserve whether it's during a pandemic or not. Whether they are old or not-so-old, a citizen or undocumented.

BE Latina

Undocumented and Uninsured: Watch Online Broadcast of COVER/AGE Today

By [Anto Chavez](#) - April 29, 2020



Photo credit Set Hernandez Rongkilyo, Héctor making a public comment in a Health4All hearing

In California, the #Health4All Campaign and Coalition emerged as a result of the fight to remove such limitations and provide universal access to healthcare, regardless of one's immigration status. One of the founders of this movement, Héctor T. Plascencia, serves as a key leader and policy advocate, and has mobilized for legislative change throughout the years.

We need to remember there is always great uncertainty around healthcare coverage for undocumented people, especially elders, domestic workers, and transgender individuals. "It's not just now, but even when there's no COVID-19, we're at a loss. Domestic workers are always excluded from any benefits," said Emma. COVER/AGE is a reminder that although the coronavirus pandemic may be temporary, unless we all demand universal access and protection, healthcare exclusion is not.

BE Latina

CORONAVIRUS

El incierto futuro y desprotegido que enfrentan cuidadores de la salud particulares en tiempos de coronavirus

Emma tiene 60 años y trabaja cuidando a una anciana de 91. Pese a que forma parte de la fuerza laboral de Estados Unidos y contribuye con sus impuestos, en el momento en que deje de trabajar, no recibirá ninguna ayuda económica para su jubilación, porque es indocumentada.

UNIVISION

14 ABR 2020 - 06:40 PM EDT

COMPARTE   



Sus preocupaciones en el trabajo han aumentado últimamente a medida que el nuevo coronavirus COVID-19 continúa extendiéndose, dice Emma, quien se negó a proporcionar su apellido para su seguridad.



Home > COMMUNITY by Steve Angeles - Apr 30, 2020

FILIPINO-MADE DOCUMENTARY SHOWS NEED FOR HEALTHCARE ACCESS FOR UNDOCUMENTED WORKERS

It's documentary by a young undocumented immigrant, which highlights the dire situation of those without legal status in America, focusing on the lack of healthcare access.

CoverAge, produced by the California Immigration Policy Center and written and directed by Set Hernandez Rongklyo, was released last year and has made the rounds at independent film festivals and among immigrant rights groups.

Documentary explores undocumented immigrants' fight for health care in California



by Charmaine Nero

Posted: Jan 15, 2020 / 10:42 PM PST / Updated: Jan 15, 2020 / 10:42 PM PST



Center for Health Journalism



Emma with her 91-year old client who she cares for five days a week. (Photo credit: Seth Hernandez Rongklyo/Pinnacles)

EXPANDING COVERAGE

Undocumented health care worker struggles to make things work during the time of coronavirus

By Jacqueline Garcia

USC Center for Health Journalism News Collaborative

April 10, 2020

La Opinión Desde 1926

CoverAge, un documental que confronta la realidad de la falta de seguro médico

El filme que se enfoca en la comunidad que no ha podido regularizar su situación legal, tendrá su premier este miércoles 20 de noviembre en The Downtown Independent



Por: Jacqueline García | 19 de Noviembre 2019

Documentary Addresses Gaps in Health Insurance Access for Undocumented Adults – North Bay Report, KRCB-FM



PRESS STILLS



Still 1: Emma taking care of elderly client
Photo Credit: Set Hernandez Rongkilyo



Still 2: Héctor making a public comment in a Health4All hearing
Photo Credit: Set Hernandez Rongkilyo



Still 3: Advocates marching in support of the Health4All campaign
Photo Credit: Set Hernandez Rongkilyo

[Downloadable press stills available online](#)

TECHNICAL DETAILS

Year of Production:	2019
Runtime:	25 mins
Country of Production:	USA
Aspect Ratio:	1920 x 1080, 16:9
Original Shooting Format:	4K, HD
Frame Rate:	23.976 fps (NTSC)
Languages in the Film:	Tagalog, English, Spanish
Subtitled Versions Available:	English, Spanish
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