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EDITORS' PICK

Want To Stay Out Of A Nursing Home? Live In Places With Immigrants

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The sign outside the Cold Spring Hills Center for Nursing and Rehabilitation, in Woodbury, New York, ... [+] [NEWSDAY VIA GETTY IMAGES](#)

U.S. seniors are much more likely to live independently and avoid being in a nursing home if there are more immigrants in an area, according to research. The findings are important in light of the aging of the U.S. population and the continued debate over immigration policy.

“Given that the elderly report that they would prefer to avoid living in institutionalized settings, it is important to understand what may help them actualize their preferences,” write economists Kristin F. Butcher (Wellesley College), Kelsey Moran (MIT) and Tara Watson (Williams College) in [research](#) published by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER). “This study suggests that the supply of less-educated immigrant labor affects caregiving arrangements, and allows more older Americans to age in the community.”

The study found a 10 percentage point increase in the less-educated immigrant population in an area reduces by 29% the probability someone 65 years or older would live in a nursing home or other institutional setting. For an individual 80 years or older, a 10 percentage point increase in the less-educated immigrant population in an area reduces the probability of institutionalization by 26%.

Caring for an aging U.S. population will become more challenging in the years ahead. “Currently, 16.5% of the U.S. population of 328 million people, or 54 million, are over the age of 65, the latest census shows,” reports [Reuters](#), citing U.S. government statistics. “By 2030, that number will rise to 74 million. The number of people over the age of 85, who generally need the most care, is growing even faster.”

Americans with older parents or individuals who expect soon enough to reach senior status already face a dilemma. The setting people prefer to receive care is an individual’s home. Elected

officials in other countries have taken steps to address the challenge.

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Canada is ahead of the United States in using immigration to care for its senior population, [providing temporary work permits](#) for foreign-born caregivers, with a direct path to permanent residence in Canada (i.e., the equivalent of a green card in the United States).

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“The federal government operates a designated and recently revamped Caregiver Program geared to providing aid to the elderly as well as providing childcare support,” according to Toronto-based immigration lawyer Peter Rekai. “It selects applicants (along with their immediate families) initially as temporary workers, but with a clear path to permanent residence.”

Canadian provinces can also choose to “nominate” caregivers for permanent residence as part of their annual immigrant allotments. Rekai expects a recent reclassification of Personal Support

Workers, eligible to work in hospitals and long-term care homes, as “skilled” workers, providing them access to the much larger pool of skilled permanent resident applicants eligible for the federal government’s [Express Entry](#) program. This should facilitate the entry of educated and experienced health care workers, a significant issue as Canada faces similar demographic pressures.

Many Cubans, Venezuelans and Nicaraguans now coming to the U.S. border could be new workers who enter the United States legally to help provide senior care—if the U.S. immigration system allowed this option. Moreover, these workers will likely adapt their skills to future labor market needs. The Canadian experience is that many foreign-born workers, admitted under previous iterations of Canada’s Caregiver program, came from the Caribbean, the Philippines and elsewhere, initially to provide home-based care to seniors and children, but went back to school, and ultimately, as Canadian citizens, filled tens of thousands of positions in Canada’s hospitals and long-term care homes, said Reka.

[Surveys](#) show younger Americans are generally more welcoming toward immigrants than older Americans. This is ironic because older Americans are the most likely to benefit from more immigration.

“Currently, immigrants play a disproportionate role in caregiving and household services, particularly in roles that may be crucial complements to aging in place,” note Butcher, Moran and Watson. If the average American prefers to live at home when they age rather than in a nursing home, they should welcome more immigrants and refugees to America.

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I am the executive director of the National Foundation for American Policy, a non-partisan public policy research organization focusing on trade, immigration and related issues based... **Read More**

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