



IMMIGRATION

Amid Legal and Political Uncertainty, DACA Remains More Important Than Ever

By [Tom K. Wong](#), Sanaa Abrar, [Tom Jawetz](#), Ignacia Rodriguez Kmec, Patrick O'Shea, Greisa Martinez Rosas, and [Philip E. Wolgin](#) | Posted on August 15, 2018, 5:30 am



Getty/Joe Raedle

Lorena Jofre, a DACA recipient, walks her daughter to school before driving to work in Miami, Florida, February 2018.

Note: The survey results can be found [here](#). For more information on the survey, please contact [Tom K. Wong](#).

Since it was first announced on June 15, 2012, the [Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals](#) (DACA) policy has provided work authorization as well as temporary relief from deportation to approximately [822,000 undocumented young people](#) across the United States.

From July 16 to August 7, 2018, Tom K. Wong of the University of California, San Diego; United We Dream; the National Immigration Law Center; and the Center for American Progress fielded a national survey to further analyze the experiences of DACA recipients. The study includes 1,050 DACA recipients in 41 states as well as the District of Columbia.

This research, [as with previous surveys](#), shows that DACA recipients are making significant contributions to the economy and their communities. In all, 96 percent of respondents are currently employed or enrolled in school.

However, the data also show how the uncertainty that the Trump administration's September [decision](#) to rescind DACA created is taking a significant toll on many DACA recipients' well-being. A majority of respondents reported that they think about being deported at least once a day. Among parents, 76 percent reported that they think about "being separated from [their] children because of deportation" at least once a day, and 74 percent think about "not being able to see [their] children grow up because of deportation" at least once a day.

DACA's impact on employment

Work authorization has been critical in helping DACA recipients participate more fully in the U.S. labor force. The data show that 89 percent of respondents are currently employed. Among respondents aged 25 and older, the employment rate jumps to 92 percent.

After receiving DACA:

- 54 percent of respondents moved to a job with better pay.
- 46 percent of respondents moved to a job with better working conditions.
- 45 percent of respondents moved to a job that "better fits [their] education and training."
- 45 percent of respondents moved to a job that "better fits [their] long-term career goals."
- 47 percent of respondents moved to a job with health insurance or other benefits.

The data also show that 6 percent of respondents started their own businesses after receiving DACA. Among respondents 25 years and older, this share increases to 8 percent. As the authors have noted in previous surveys, DACA recipients are outpacing the [general population](#) in terms of business creation.

DACA's impact on earnings

Several years of data, including this 2018 survey, make clear that DACA is having a positive and significant effect on wages. The average hourly wage of respondents increased by 78 percent since receiving DACA, from \$10.32 per hour to \$18.42 per hour. Among respondents 25 years and older, the average hourly wage increased by 97 percent since receiving DACA. These higher wages are not only important for recipients and their families but also for [tax revenues](#) and economic growth at the local, state, and federal levels.

The data also show that respondents' average annual earnings come out to \$35,485, and their median annual earnings total \$32,000. Among respondents 25 years and older, their average and median annual earnings are \$42,049 and \$38,490, respectively.

These higher wages have resulted in greater financial independence and security for DACA recipients. Seventy-seven percent of respondents reported that their increased earnings have "helped [them] become financially independent," and 75 percent reported that their increased earnings have "helped [their] family financially." Among respondents currently in school, 77 percent reported that their increased earnings have helped pay for tuition. Finally, among respondents with children, 48 percent reported that their increased earnings have helped pay for child care expenses.

DACA's impact on the economy

The purchasing power of DACA recipients continues to increase. For example, 62 percent of respondents reported purchasing their first car after receiving DACA. These large purchases matter in terms of state revenue, as most states collect a percentage of the purchase price in sales tax as well as [registration and title fees](#). The added revenue for states comes in addition to the [safety benefits](#) of having more licensed and insured drivers on the roads.

The data also show that 14 percent of respondents purchased their first home after receiving DACA. Among respondents 25 years and older, this share increases to 20 percent. In the broader economy, home purchases lead to [increased job creation](#) and the infusion of [new spending](#) in local economies.

DACA's impact on education

Of the 40 percent of respondents who are currently enrolled in school, three-quarters are pursuing a bachelor's degree or higher. When it comes to educational attainment, 32 percent of respondents reported having a bachelor's degree or higher. Importantly, among those who are currently in school, a robust 93 percent said that, because of DACA, "[they] pursued educational opportunities that [they] previously could not."

The uncertainty and resolve of DACA recipients

The legal and political [uncertainty](#) surrounding DACA is weighing heavily on its recipients. For example, 45 percent of respondents reported that they think about being detained in an immigration detention facility at least once a day; 55 percent reported that they think about being deported at least once a day; and 64 percent reported that they think about a family member being deported at least once a day.

Among recipients with children, 76 percent reported that they think about "being separated from [their] children because of deportation" at least once a day, and 74 percent think about "not being able to see [their] children grow up because of deportation" at least once a day.

Despite many respondents' uncertainty, the data also show tremendous resolve and civic engagement among DACA recipients. For example, since receiving DACA, 49 percent of respondents reported that they have become more politically active, and 52 percent reported that they have become more involved in their communities. After their DACA applications were approved, 64 percent reported, "I am no longer afraid of my immigration status"; another 64 percent reported, "I feel more like I belong in the U.S."

Conclusion

These findings could not paint a clearer picture: DACA has been unreservedly good for recipients, the U.S. economy, and society at large. Ending DACA would not only be cruel and counterproductive, but it would also roll back the gains that DACA recipients have made, as many are hitting their stride in their lives and careers. At a time when DACA is facing its most serious threat ever, understanding the benefits of the program for recipients, their families, their communities, and the nation as a whole is all the more important.

Tom K. Wong is associate professor of political science at the University of California, San Diego and a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. Sanaa Abrar is advocacy director at United We Dream. Tom Jawetz is vice president for Immigration Policy at the Center for American Progress. Ignacia Rodriguez Kmec is immigration policy advocate at the National Immigration Law Center. Patrick O'Shea is research

and narrative strategist at the National Immigration Law Center. Greisa Martinez Rosas is deputy executive director at United We Dream. Philip E. Wolgin is managing director for Immigration Policy at the Center for American Progress.

The authors would like to thank all those who took and shared the survey for their time and effort in helping to bring these stories to light.

Methodology

The survey was administered by Professor Tom K. Wong to an online panel of DACA recipients whom partner organizations recruited. Several steps were taken to account for the known sources of bias that result from such online panels. To prevent ballot stuffing—meaning one person submitting multiple responses—Professor Wong did not offer an incentive to respondents for taking the survey and used a state-of-the-art online survey platform that does not allow one IP address to submit multiple responses. To prevent spoiled ballots—meaning people responding who are not DACA recipients—Professor Wong used two validation tests for undocumented status. Multiple questions were asked about each respondent’s migratory history and DACA application history. These questions were asked at different parts of the survey. When repeated, the questions were posed using different wording. If there was agreement in the answers such that there was consistency regarding the respondent’s migratory history and DACA application history, the respondent was kept in the resulting pool of respondents. If not, the respondent was excluded.



© 2019 - Center for American Progress