

Trump admin can share immigrants' Medicaid data with ICE, judge rules

Blue states sued to prevent Medicaid data from being used in deportations.



Immigration officials want to use Medicaid data to help identify and locate undocumented immigrants. | David Dee Delgado/Getty Images

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A federal judge ruled Monday that the Trump administration can resume sharing location data about undocumented immigrants receiving public health insurance benefits with Immigration and Customs Enforcement, starting next month.

U.S. District Judge Vince Chhabria's [ruling](#) is a victory for President Donald Trump's mass-deportation agenda as it allows ICE to use Medicaid data in deportation cases beginning Jan. 6. [The agency had been blocked from doing so](#) for months amid a legal challenge from blue states.

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"The sharing of such information is clearly authorized by law and the agencies have adequately explained their decisions," Chhabria wrote in a seven-page order.

The decision marks a significant setback for California Attorney General Rob Bonta and 21 of his Democratic counterparts, who [sued in July](#) to prevent the Trump administration from using Medicaid data obtained from the Department of Health and Human Services to target immigrants.

A spokesperson for the California Department of Justice said after the ruling that people signed up for the state's health care program with the understanding that their personal information would be used for that purpose alone.

“The Trump Administration’s effort to use Medicaid data for immigration enforcement is a violation of their trust and will lead to fewer people seeking vital healthcare,” they said in a statement.

Undocumented immigrants are not eligible to enroll in federal Medicaid programs, but California and other blue states — Illinois, Colorado, New York, Washington, Oregon, Minnesota, as well as Washington, D.C. — allow some people to receive state-funded benefits through their Medicaid implementation programs regardless of immigration status.

Chhabria’s order is narrowly tailored to six categories of “basic” personal information: citizenship, immigration status, address, phone number, date of birth and Medicaid ID.

The Trump administration is only allowed to share Medicaid data about people unlawfully living in the United States, meaning ICE can’t access personal information collected from other immigrants receiving Medicaid.

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ICE and HHS remain barred from sharing personal health records and other potentially sensitive medical information for immigration enforcement under a preliminary injunction. Chhabria said the agencies did not provide a compelling reason for exchanging such information, which California and other states argued would violate health privacy laws.

“Beyond the basic information discussed above, the policies are totally unclear and do not appear to be the product of a coherent decisionmaking process,” Chhabria wrote.

California sued the Trump administration following reports that HHS was sharing personal data collected from undocumented immigrant Medicaid enrollees with immigration officials at the Department of Homeland Security.

Chhabria in August temporarily barred the Trump administration from sharing such information for immigration enforcement purposes, but left the door open for data transfers to resume. His decision to revise the injunction comes after ICE and HHS [published formal notices in November](#) detailing how they planned to use Medicaid data in immigration cases.

DHS spokesperson Tricia McLaughlin in a statement called the court ruling “a victory for the rule of law and American taxpayers.”


The Trump administration has been less successful in seizing personal information from other government databases. Judges in recent decisions have blocked the White House's attempts to share [taxpayer data](#) and food aid recipients' information with immigration officials.

Chhabria's order will remain in place until a final decision is made in the case. It may be lifted earlier if ICE and HHS issue new policies that provide a legal basis for collecting more types of personal information.

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