



The Latino Community in the Time of Coronavirus: The Case for a Broad and Inclusive Government Response

Systemic inequality has been embedded in the U.S. social safety net since its creation, excluding workers and families of color through both explicit and indirect means. The COVID-19 crisis has only worsened these inequities, as available data from the crisis show Black and Latino communities disproportionately suffering the health and economic effects of the virus. These disparities have been magnified by the fact that recent recovery legislation has left out large segments of Latino and immigrant communities.

The Latino Community in the Time of Coronavirus: The Case for a Broad and Inclusive Government Response, provides an overview of how Latinos have experienced the first 120 days of the pandemic. It considers (a) Latino communities' pre-existing economic and health vulnerabilities that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis; (b) the composition of Latino communities excluded from economic recovery efforts; and (c) recommendations for an inclusive and sustainable government response, absent which will lead to worsening disparities for Latinos and other racial/ethnic groups.

The First 120 Days of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the U.S. Government Response.

Since declaring a national emergency on March 13, the United States has registered more than 2.58 million confirmed cases and lost more than 127 thousand lives as of July 1.¹ In turn, state and local mandates intended to slow the spread of the virus have led to economic declines at levels last experienced during the Great Depression in the 1930s.² Congress has enacted over \$2.4 trillion across four legislative packages since the outbreak in response, but dangerous gaps remain due to unequal social and economic foundations on which Black and Latino families must build their lives.

- **During this period, Latinos are disproportionately contracting and dying from COVID-19.** Latinos and other communities of color are contracting COVID-19 at higher rates than the general population. As of July 1, Latinos make up 35% of all COVID-19 cases for which race/ethnicity data are available, but only 18.5% of the total U.S. population. Non-Hispanic White people account for 35% of cases but make up 76% of the population; non-Hispanic Black people account for 21% of cases and 13% of the population.³
- **Latino children and youth are getting sick and dying at the highest rates.** As of July 1, 55% of all confirmed cases in children (ages 5-17) and 43% of all cases in youth (ages 18-29) are Latino; Latino children and youth make up roughly 40% of all deaths in both age categories. Latinos make up only 25% of the population ages 0-17 and 22% of ages 18-29.⁴
- **The lack of accurate racial and ethnic data is obscuring the true effect of COVID-19 on Latinos.** Ethnicity data has only been reported in 50% of all cases nationwide.⁵

Latinos have historically uneven access to critical health and nutrition supports.

As UnidosUS has reported, the number of uninsured Latinos had been rising even before the pandemic.⁶ The health effects of COVID-19 are being compounded in Latino communities by high uninsured rates, immigration policy barriers to health care, high participation rates in essential job categories, and rising hunger.

- **Many Latinos have lost employer-sponsored coverage since March due to lay-offs.** In June, Latino uninsured rates peaked with an estimated 22% of Latino adults lacking any form of health coverage.⁷
- **Food insecurity among Latinos is on the rise.** In April, 50% of Latino households reported trouble accessing food, medicine, or household supplies.⁸ Census data suggest one in five Latino families with children has experiencing food insecurity since the COVID-19 outbreak; Latino families have experienced food shortages at a rate roughly 50% higher than the national average throughout the crisis.⁹
- **Trump anti-family policies have compounded concerns.** On top of immigration barriers to affordable health care, Latinos eligible for critical health, nutrition, and other public supports—including U.S. citizens—were eschewing these programs before the crisis out of fear and confusion around the Trump administration’s harsh anti-immigrant policies.¹⁰

Latinos face greater economic and workplace risks, but lower to no reward.

Latinos have been hit the hardest by the economic downturn, experiencing wage and job losses far above national averages.¹¹

- **Hispanic workers are twice as likely to have been laid off as a result of the pandemic.¹²** The national unemployment rate in June was 11.1% compared to the Latino unemployment rate of 14.5.¹³
- **Polling show that 60-65% of Latino households have lost wages or work due to COVID-19.** This is compared to 46% of Americans overall.¹⁴ This is partially due to Latino overrepresentation in industries vulnerable to sudden economic shocks, such as hospitality (24%) and construction (30.4%).¹⁵
- **At the same time, Latino and immigrant workers are overrepresented in essential jobs.** Latinos are 54% of agricultural workers, 35% of meat processing workers, and 29% of medical assistants, putting them at high risk of exposure to COVID-19. Most cannot afford to stop working and lack worker protections to self-isolate if exposed.

Latinos have not been fully included in COVID-19 relief and recovery legislation to date.

Latinos have lower participation rates in programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Unemployment Insurance (UI) and the Affordable Care Act marketplace than almost any other racial/ethnic group. This imbalance predates the COVID-19 crisis, in part due to immigration-related fears which impact U.S. citizens and immigrants alike. Relief legislation has not sufficiently bridged these gaps. 5.5 million people—including Latino citizens, legal residents, mixed-status families, and undocumented taxpayers—were excluded from Economic Impact Payments under the CARES Act. In the first round of Payment Protection Program (PPP) loans, only 4% went to Latino small business owners and roughly 12% went to Black and Latino small business owners in subsequent rounds.¹⁶

To address these shortcomings, UnidosUS recommends:

The health care system must provide inclusive care to everyone, regardless of income, race and ethnicity, or immigration status.

- Expand the COVID-19 pandemic response. Everyone should have access to COVID testing, treatment, and vaccines regardless of ability to pay.
- Remove immigration-based eligibility restrictions and extend Medicaid coverage to the uninsured and underinsured, and CHIP to all children.
- Increase Medicaid enrollment through a federal matching assistance percentage (FMAP) increase.

The federal government must increase funding to prevent food insecurity and widespread hunger in the Latino community.

- Increase investments for SNAP and Disaster SNAP, including increases to maximum benefits and minimum monthly benefits.
- Fully expand the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) program to include all immigrants who would otherwise qualify.

Economic recovery measures must be inclusive, sustainable, and equitable amongst all populations, regardless of immigration status.

- Any tax-paying families, including those with ITIN numbers, should receive relief payments. Expand unemployment insurance benefits and relief payments for all tax-paying workers who would otherwise qualify, regardless of immigration status.
- All workers should receive access to unemployment insurance and benefits they have paid into. Future legislation should include paid sick and family leave for all workers; paycheck protection for gig workers and minority-owned small business owners; and “hazard pay” for essential workers, regardless of immigration status.
- Automatically renew employment authorization for DACA and TPS recipients eligible to work.

About Us

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our community stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit unidosus.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

Endnotes

- 1 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Cases in the U.S.” July 1, 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-updates/cases-in-us.html> (accessed July 1, 2020).
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- 7 UnidosUS calculation using U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Household Pulse Survey: Health Tables.” Table 3. <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp6.html> (accessed July 1, 2020).
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- 13 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “The Employment Situation – June 2020,” news release, July 2, 2020, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.toc.htm> (accessed July 2, 2020).
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- 16 Ruth Simon, “In Race for Small-Business Loans, Winning Hinged on Where Firms Bank,” *The Wall Street Journal*, April 20, 2020. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/in-race-for-small-business-loans-winning-hinged-on-where-firms-bank-11587410421> (accessed May 15, 2020); and SOMOS poll.