



NHLA National Hispanic Leadership Agenda

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

October 22, 2021

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Neal

Chairman
Ways and Means Committee

Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Chairman
Energy and Commerce Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ron Wyden

Chairman
Senate Finance Committee
Washington, D.C. 20510

- Alianza Americas
- American G.I. Forum
- ASPIRA Association
- AVANCE Inc.
- Casa de Esperanza: National Latin@ Network
- Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute
- Farmworker Justice
- Green Latinos
- Hispanic Association of Colleges & Universities
- Hispanic Federation
- Hispanic National Bar Association
- Hispanics in Philanthropy
- Inter-University Program for Latino Research
- Labor Council for Latin American Advancement
- LatinoJustice PRLDEF
- League of United Latin American Citizens
- MANA, A National Latina Organization
- Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
- Mi Familia Vota
- NALEO Education Fund
- National Association of Hispanic Federal Executives
- National Association of Latino Arts and Culture
- National Association of Latino Independent Producers
- National Conference of Puerto Rican Women, Inc.
- National Day Laborer Organizing Network
- National Hispanic Caucus of State Legislators
- National Hispanic Council on Aging
- National Hispanic Foundation for the Arts
- National Hispanic Media Coalition
- National Hispanic Medical Association
- National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health
- National Latinx Psychological Association
- Presente.org
- SER Jobs for Progress National
- Southwest Voter Registration Education Project
- U.S.- Mexico Foundation
- UnidosUS
- United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce
- United States Hispanic Leadership Institute
- United States-Mexico Chamber of Commerce
- Voto Latino

Re: Urgency in Closing the Medicaid Coverage Gap Via the Build Back Better Act

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer, Chairman Neal, Chairman Pallone, and Chairman Wyden:

As leaders of civil rights and advocacy organizations that work to empower the more than 62 million Latinos in the U.S., we write to urge you to finally close the Medicaid coverage gap with a permanent, meaningful alternative that provides quality healthcare to families in need. This is the consensus opinion of the organizations that comprise the NHLA, as [laid out](#) in our 2021-24 Public Policy Agenda.

The COVID-19 pandemic and economic crisis have disproportionately impacted Latinos and other communities of color. As a result of COVID-19, Latino life expectancy has [declined](#) by three years, the highest of any group. Our community is [more than twice](#) as likely to be hospitalized or die from the virus as non-Hispanic whites; and the Latino [unemployment rate](#) is still higher than the nation overall. Even as Latinos kept our country running throughout the pandemic, greater workplace exposure [contributed](#) to our higher case rates and death toll. At the same time, Latinos often work in occupations that don't offer job-based coverage, making Medicaid even more important.

Through the Build Back Better Act, Congress has a critical opportunity to finally realize a key part of the Affordable Care Act's (ACA) vision to cover more Americans and to address the racial and ethnic health disparities exacerbated by the pandemic. The ACA's Medicaid

expansion helped cover over 18 million people, including at least three million [Latinos](#). Nevertheless, 12 states have refused to expand, even in the middle of a national health crisis. The resulting coverage gap [leaves](#) more than two million uninsured Americans, including 610,000 Latinos, with no viable path to affordable, quality health coverage.

Closing the coverage gap is a policy choice with real consequences for racial and health equity. More than half of the people living in this gap are people of color, including 30% who are Latino. Because of where Latinos live, the refusal of states like Texas and Florida to expand serves as a significant barrier to reducing the high Latino uninsured rate. While families wait for their states to expand Medicaid, the [uninsured rate](#) for Latino parents and children in these states is higher and increasing faster than in expansion states. COVID-19 has made racial health disparities worse, but Latinos can't wait any longer for intransigent state leaders to act.

We also urge you to close the gap in Medicaid funding to U.S. territories, which unlike States, receive a fixed block grant that too often does not meet the health needs of people in need. In Puerto Rico, for example, between 2012-2019 the federal block grant covered just 15% of its total Medicaid spending. Without additional funding and an equitable expansion of Medicaid, nearly two million Americans in Puerto Rico and other American territories will see their access to medical care significantly diminished. Congress cannot continue to treat Puerto Ricans and Americans in other U.S. territories as second-class citizens.

We cannot recover from the worst health crisis of our lifetimes by failing to deliver basic coverage for the most vulnerable. Congress must provide for permanent coverage in the Build Back Better Act that is as close as possible to the coverage that individuals would receive through Medicaid expansion. The language proposed by the House of Representatives, which includes limits on cost-sharing and premiums, year-round enrollment, funding for linguistically competent outreach, and a permanent federal Medicaid alternative, can finally address the inequity that results from the coverage gap.

Congress has an obligation to solve this longstanding issue. Thank you for your dedication to improving the health and well-being of our community and the nation.

Sincerely,



Elena Rios, MD, MSPH, FACP

National Hispanic Medical Association
President & CEO

NHLA Health Committee Co-Chair



Lupe M. Rodríguez

National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice
Executive Director

NHLA Health Committee Co-Chair



Eric Rodriguez

UnidosUS
Senior Vice President

NHLA Economic Empowerment and Labor Committee Co-Chair