

MEMORANDUM

To: Richard Figueroa, Deputy Cabinet Secretary, Office of Governor Newsom
From: UnidosUS
Date: October 22, 2021
Re: Latino parent poll findings on vaccine concerns and UnidosUS recommendations to increase equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for children
Cc: Dr. Tomás J. Aragón, M.D., Dr.P.H., State Public Health Officer and Director California Department of Public Health (CDPH); Dr. Robert Schechter Chief, Immunizations Branch, California Department of Public Health (CDPH); The Honorable Tony Thurmond Superintendent of Public Instruction California Department of Education

Summary

COVID-19 vaccines remain the strongest and most critical protection against the risks of contracting the virus. The state's recent implementation of vaccine mandates in schools and other settings are essential tools to increase vaccination rates and control the spread of the virus. Importantly, our recent poll found that a majority of Latino parents support vaccine mandates in a wide range of settings.¹ The data show that Latino parents support several policies that seek to close vaccination gaps among Latinos, including that 70% support policies that require all students and staff to be vaccinated to attend school in person. However, essential for its success is that this and other mandates are implemented in a manner that is inclusive and equitable.

Latinos continue to experience systemic barriers to access COVID-19 vaccines that could impede their ability to vaccinate their children.² Latinos also continue to trail behind in vaccination rates while experiencing disproportionate impacts from the virus.^{3,4} According to the California COVID-19 Dashboard, Latinos have

1 UnidosUS, "Majority of Latino Parents Support Vaccine Requirements for Kids, Educational Staff to Return to In-Person Schooling," <https://www.unidosus.org/press-releases/majority-of-latino-parents-support-vaccine-requirements-for-kids-educational-staff-to-return-to-in-person-schooling/>, (accessed October 21, 2021).

2 Arce, Julissa, "Health care equity is a key part of racial justice," UnidosUS Blog, August 5, 2021, <https://www.unidosus.org/blog/2021/08/05/health-care-equity-racial-justice/>, (accessed February 20, 2021).

3 Ibid.

4 California for All, "Vaccination progress data," <https://covid19.ca.gov/vaccination-progress-data/#overview> (accessed September 16, 2021), [Vaccinated Status by Group](#), (accessed October 18, 2021).

received nearly 30% of the vaccines administered in the state yet make up 39.4% of the vaccine eligible population. As of October 18, 2021, more than half (53.1%) of COVID-19 cases and nearly half (45.5%) of COVID-19 deaths in California are Latino.⁵

As the Delta variant continues to spread, risks for infection are increasing for Latino children who are back in school and remain unvaccinated.⁶ According to the CDC, Latino children are more than three times as likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 than are non-Hispanic, white children.⁷ Nationally, more than five million children have tested positive for COVID-19. In California, more than 60% of all COVID-19 cases among children under the age of 17 are Latino.⁸

Our [California state fact sheet](#) on a recent [national poll](#) that we conducted among Latino parents reveals key lessons for those seeking to increase vaccination rates among Latino children and families, including key barriers that Latino parents face.⁹ Key findings from our poll include:

- California Latino parents today feel more concerned than last year about COVID-19's impact on their family and support policies to improve their family's health and financial well-being.
- Health care professionals are key messengers to close vaccination and information gaps among California Latino parents concerned about the vaccine's safety and side effects on children.
- Financial costs and accessibility concerns weigh heavily on California Latino parents when thinking about getting themselves and their children vaccinated. For these reasons, Latino parents support policies and approaches to reduce barriers and increase access to vaccines.

5 California COVID-19 Dashboard, "Tracking COVID-19 in California," <https://covid19.ca.gov/state-dashboard/#todays-update>, (accessed October 18, 2021).

6 Reyes, E.A., and Rong Gong Lin II, "COVID-19 cases rising among unvaccinated youth, Latinos in L.A. County," Los Angeles Times, August 26, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-08-26/covid-cases-los-angeles-county>, (accessed September 20, 2021).

7 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Disparities in COVID-19-Associated Hospitalizations Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities," <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/racial-ethnic-disparities/disparities-hospitalization.html>, (accessed September 20, 2021).

Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities," <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/racial-ethnic-disparities/disparities-hospitalization.html>, (accessed September 20, 2021).

8 California COVID-19 Dashboard, "Tracking COVID-19 in California," <https://covid19.ca.gov/state-dashboard/#todays-update>, (accessed October 7, 2021).

9 UnidosUS, "Majority of Latino Parents Support Vaccine Requirements for Kids, Educational Staff to Return to In-Person Schooling," <https://www.unidosus.org/press-releases/majority-of-latino-parents-support-vaccine-requirements-for-kids-educational-staff-to-return-to-in-person-schooling/>, (accessed October 4, 2021).

- A majority of California Latino parents support vaccine mandates in a wide range of settings.

Additionally, these two publications by UnidosUS offer actionable insights and guidance to close vaccination gaps in the Latino community:

- [*Seizing the Moment: Recommended Approaches for Equitable Distribution of COVID-19 Vaccines in the Latino Community*](#). This paper provides actionable insights on how localities are promoting vaccinations in the Latino community.¹⁰
- [*The COVID-19 Vaccines and the Latino Community: Principles for an Equitable Distribution*](#). This paper offers guidance for state and local leaders to address and mitigate the racial and ethnic disparities in access to COVID-19 vaccines to ensure the nation fully recovers from the pandemic.¹¹

Given vaccination gaps among California Latinos, the barriers California Latino parents face to vaccinate themselves and their children, and the anticipated authorization of vaccines for children between the ages of five and 11, we offer the following recommendations that build on UnidosUS's previous letter to Governor Newsom to improve the equitable distribution of vaccines in the state.¹²

1) Strengthen local partnerships between education, health, and community-based leaders.

- **Issue guidance for partnerships between local education and health departments** to 1) bring nurses and health providers who are trusted health care messengers in the Latino community to school sites to administer vaccines; and 2) leverage school district communication networks to raise awareness about the availability of vaccines for children. These partnerships would also help reduce high rates of school absenteeism due to school-age

¹⁰ UnidosUS, "Seizing the Moment: Recommended Approaches for Equitable Distribution of COVID-19 Vaccines in the Latino Community," <https://www.unidosus.org/publications/seizingthemoment/>, (accessed October 4, 2021).

¹¹ UnidosUS, "The COVID-19 Vaccines and the Latino Community: Principles for an Equitable Distribution," <https://www.unidosus.org/publications/2149-the-covid-19-vaccines-and-the-latino-community-principles-for-an-equitable-distribution/>, (accessed October 8, 2021).

¹² UnidosUS, "California Letter to the Governor on COVID-19 Vaccines," May 25, 2021, <https://www.unidosus.org/publications/california-letter-to-the-governor-on-covid-19-vaccines/>, (accessed October 18, 2021).

children who are quarantined at home to avoid contracting COVID-19 at school because more children would be vaccinated and protected.^{13,14}

2) Bring vaccines to accessible, familiar areas.

- **Revise the state's Employer Vaccination Toolkit** to include suggested best practices for employers to adopt that would reduce barriers and increase access to vaccines for workers with children.¹⁵ As you know, this guidance is used by employers to identify and implement on-site and off-site vaccinations and adopt policies, such as paid sick leave, for workers impacted by COVID-19. According to our poll, Latino parents continue to experience barriers to vaccination for their children, including having to schedule around their work hours and increased concerns about having to miss work.
- **Leverage schools or school districts** that provide routine flu vaccinations or that were successful in providing COVID-19 vaccinations to adolescents as vaccination sites for five to 11-year-old children.¹⁶ According to our poll, the majority of Latino parents in California support approaches, such as holding vaccinations onsite at schools, day cares, and children's sporting events, to reduce barriers and increase access to vaccines.

3) Make information about vaccines easily accessible.

- **Target investments to fund Spanish-language community-based outreach and awareness campaigns** to disseminate information and messaging on vaccines for children. UnidosUS's Esperanza Hope for All (EHFA) Mobile Educational Tour serves as a model approach for the state to invest in bringing information about vaccines directly into Latino neighborhoods.¹⁷

4) Strengthen data collection and reporting by race and ethnicity

13 Jones, Carolyn. "Absenteeism surging since schools reopened." EdSource. September 27, 2021. <https://edsource.org/2021/absenteeism-surgingsince-schools-reopened/661507>. (accessed October 12, 2021).

14 Hoeven, Emily. "Why Many California Students Keep Missing Schools," CalMatters. September 28, 2021. <https://calmatters.org/newsletters/whatmatters/2021/09/california-schools-reopening-covid/>. (accessed October 12, 2021).

15 State of California, "Employer Vaccination Toolkit," <https://saferatwork.covid19.ca.gov/employer-vaccination-toolkit/>. (accessed October 7, 2021).

16 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Pediatric COVID-19 Vaccination Operational Planning Guide," <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/downloads/Pediatric-Planning-Guide.pdf>. (accessed October 18, 2021).

17 UnidosUS, "Esperanza Hope for All Mobile Educational Tour," <https://www.unidosus.org/esperanzahopeforall/mobiletour/#ehfa-mobile-tour-dates>. (accessed October 7, 2021).

- **Enhance disaggregated data collection, analysis and reporting by race and ethnicity** that can be used by community-based organizations, such as UnidosUS's Affiliates, to target communities being left behind. Available data show clear disparities in COVID-19 cases, deaths, hospitalizations, and vaccination rates between Latinos and other populations. Still, those data sets are incomplete, making it difficult to know the true extent of disparities and to facilitate better and more targeted decision-making about the health, social, and economic needs of Latinos.
- **Convene regular focus groups with community-based organizations to collect qualitative data** to better understand the on-the-ground needs of Latinos.¹⁸ Doing so would help inform targeted interventions to close vaccination gaps in communities disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

5) Reduce structural barriers to vaccine access.

- **Issue guidance to vaccine providers and state and local governments** to clarify that Social Security numbers, government-issued identification, and other documentation are not required for parents to receive a vaccination for themselves or their children. Further clarifying guidance is needed to ensure that vaccination sites do not turn away Latino parents and their children who may be noncitizens, live in mixed-status households, or lack a government-issued identification. The CDC's COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force has made public their position that U.S. citizenship is not a requirement to receive a vaccine.^{19,20} Still, more than one in three (37%) of Latino parents in California surveyed had to pay a co-pay/fee, provide proof of insurance, or present a government-issued identification to have their child vaccinated.

It is clear that you share our sense of urgency about the importance of effective strategies to increase vaccination rates among the Latino community. UnidosUS and its Affiliates would welcome the opportunity to partner with you to close vaccination gaps and share key learnings about proven approaches that would

18 California Department of Health Care Services (DHCS), "Medi-Cal COVID-19 Vaccinations," <https://www.dhcs.ca.gov/Documents/COVID-19/COVID-19-Vaccine-Stats-07-08-21.pdf>, (accessed October 7, 2021).

19 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "COVID-19 Vaccines Are Free to the Public," <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/no-cost.html>, (accessed 9.20.21)

20 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "CDC COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force Position on Citizenship and Residency," CDC, May 3, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/citizenship-residency-position.html> (accessed October 7, 2021).

ensure all California Latino children and families have equitable access to vaccines.

Thank you for considering our views. Please contact UnidosUS California State Director Esmeralda López at elopez@unidosus.org if you have any questions.