



UNIDOSUS

STRONGER COMMUNITIES. STRONGER AMERICA.

THE POWER OF US

A Latino Policy Resource for the 118th Congress



UnidosUS is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that serves as the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Since 1968, we have challenged the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos through our unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an [Affiliate Network](#) of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico. We believe in an America where economic, political, and social progress is a reality for all Latinos, and we collaborate across communities to achieve it.

The UnidosUS Policy and Advocacy component is a leading think tank focusing on issues relevant to the Latino community. Through research, policy analysis, advocacy efforts, civic engagement, and campaigns, it defines a rigorous policy agenda that includes stances on immigration, education, health, employment and the economy, and housing. This component aligns federal work with state-level advocacy and provides support and expertise to state and local leaders in implementing Latino-focused policy.

For more information on UnidosUS, visit unidosus.org or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

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THE POWER OF US

A Latino Policy Resource for the 118th Congress

FORWARD

Dear Members of the 118th Congress:

Congratulations on your election or re-election to Congress. With this publication, ***The Power of Us: A Latino Policy Resource of the 118th Congress***, we aim to introduce—or re-introduce—our organization and work to you. As the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization dedicated to advancing equity for our nation's 62 million Latinos, we hope you look to us as a trusted thought-partner and resource. We also hope to lean on you to advance legislation that shapes a more prosperous and equitable future for all Americans.

In these pages, you'll see how we fulfill our mission. We work closely with our nearly 300 Affiliates across the country—organizations that, since our founding in 1968 as the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), have been the heart of our organization. We administer culturally relevant programs with our Affiliates that are recognized as first in class. Through our *Esperanza* Hope For All campaign, we helped millions of Latinos get vaccinated, and our collaborative efforts helped to ensure that more than 1.4 million Latino children were lifted out of poverty by the expanded fully refundable child tax credit in 2021.

Our advocacy is greatly informed by our Affiliates' leadership and service in the Hispanic community and our partnerships with many diverse stakeholders. We also work in key states where the Latino population is high and growing—namely, Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas. These states are focal points for the Latino community and can be incubators for innovative policy and program solutions that inform our federal advocacy.

The state and local lessons we learn are enhanced by our two decades of voter engagement. UnidosUS has registered nearly one million Hispanic voters, including more than 42,000 in the recent midterm elections. Our latest public opinion research on Latino voter perspectives, including our midterms [national poll](#), 8 state-based polls, and election eve poll, informed our efforts to educate the media and policymakers about our community's priorities. We include a summary of our core findings below, which are a must-read for policymakers who want a comprehensive, accurate understanding of Latino voters' current priorities.

Here we also summarize the policy work led by our teams of experts across five critical areas, including the economy, civil rights, education, health, immigration, and housing. We link to our latest publications, analyses, and blogs, which provide many of the policy solutions that will be needed to improve the lives and prospects of Latino workers, families, and their children. And we explain our largest institutional investment in a single initiative to date: our HOME Initiative, which aims to help build intergenerational wealth by significantly increasing the Latino homeownership rate.

We welcome your partnership. If I (or any of our issue experts) may be of service to your legislative agenda or constituents, please reach out to a member of our Legislative Affairs team, whose members are noted on the next page. *¡Adelante!*



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink.

Eric Rodriguez
Senior Vice President
Policy and Advocacy, UnidosUS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

UnidosUS's (formerly the National Council of La Raza) Latino policy resource is the culmination of a collaborative effort by staff within the Policy and Advocacy department. Susan Collins, Senior Director of Legislative Affairs, and Laura MacCleery, Senior Policy Director, co-authored this publication. Policy experts (who are noted throughout this publication) helped author the sections related to their issue areas. Eric Rodriguez, Senior Vice President, Policy and Advocacy, provided guidance and review.

Emily Mace, PhD, UnidosUS Consultant and Emelynn Arroyave, Content Specialist aided in editing and preparing this report for publication, and Kelly Isaac, Director, Design and Brand, formatted and designed the final report. The content of this paper is the sole responsibility of UnidosUS and may not reflect the views of UnidosUS's funders or any other individual or organization that assisted in its preparation.

HOW TO REACH US

UnidosUS's engagement with the U.S. Congress is guided by our Legislative Affairs team. For more information about our policy priorities, assistance with legislation that includes Latinos, and/or to consult our issue area experts, please contact:



Susan Collins, Senior Director
Legislative Affairs || scollins@unidosus.org

Susan leads the legislative team to build and nurture relationships with Congress to provide relevant and timely information about public policy issues that matter to the Latino community. Her extensive experience includes the ability to set clear policy and legislative priorities and to find common ground to advance policy goals. Prior to joining UnidosUS, Susan was the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the National Partnership for New Americans, before which she served as Legislative Director and Chief of Staff over nearly twenty years in the U.S. House of Representatives. Susan spent her early career with local organizations in Texas, focusing on the health, education, and wellbeing of the Latino community.



Alvaro Zarco, Senior Legislative Analyst
Legislative Affairs || azarco@unidosus.org

Alvaro develops strategies to advance legislative priorities that benefit the Hispanic community. He identifies and builds advocacy opportunities on Capitol Hill, where he worked for the Senate Democratic Policy and Communications Committee, the Office of Senator Tim Kaine, and the Senate Agriculture Committee. Alvaro has a bachelor of arts degree in international and comparative politics and a master of science degree in conflict analysis and resolution.

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HEALTH

IN PARTNERSHIP

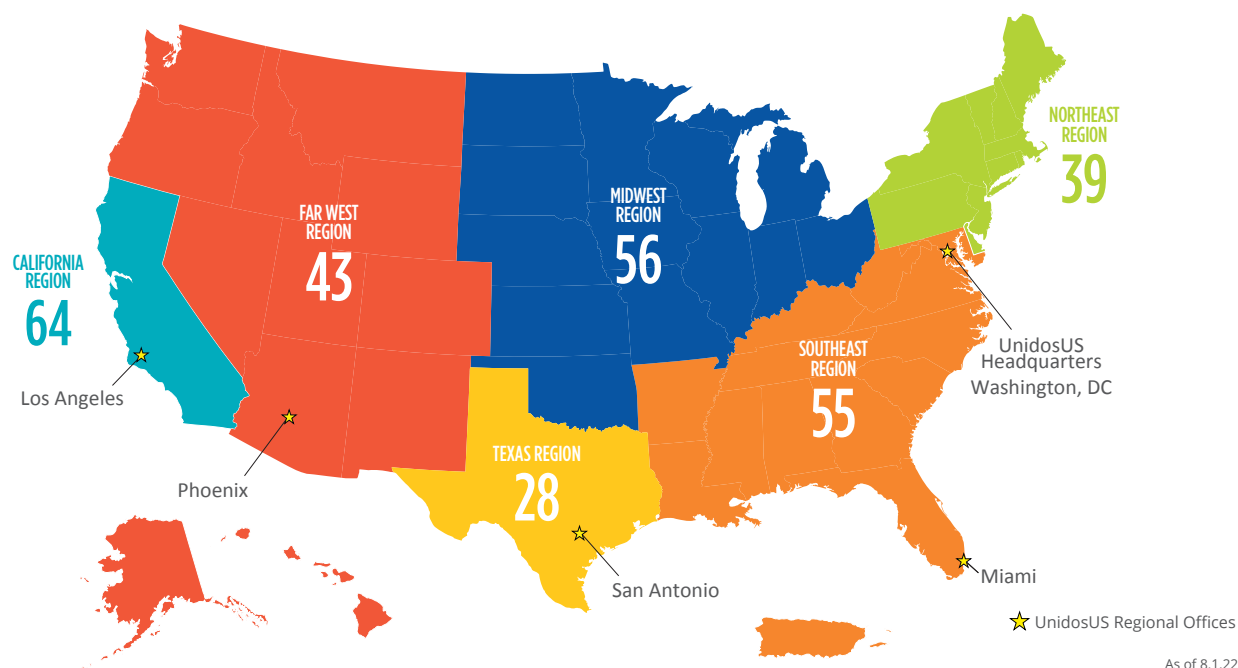
UNITED HEALTH



Valle del Sol
COMMUNITY HEALTH



OUR DRIVING FORCE: THE UNIDOS US AFFILIATE NETWORK (282 TOTAL)



The success of UnidosUS's policy and advocacy work hinges on the alignment of our policy, programs, and [Affiliate Partners](#) to create opportunities for Latinos and advance equity. Affiliates help UnidosUS to understand the interests, talents, and needs of Latino communities throughout the nation—they inform programmatic efforts, help shape our policy priorities, and serve as trusted messengers to and on behalf of the Hispanic community.

UnidosUS Affiliates are non-profit organizations serving predominantly low-income Latino communities in the areas of education, health, workforce development, housing, economic empowerment, immigration legal services, digital equity, and civic engagement.

The UnidosUS Affiliate Network of Hispanic-Serving Community-Based Organizations:



Serves families across 147 cities and towns and in **193 congressional districts.**

Includes nearly 300 community-based organizations in 39 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, DC.

Seven Affiliates founded UnidosUS in 1968 and, as our Affiliate network has grown, Affiliates have become the heart of our organization. The Affiliate Network includes nearly 300 community-based organizations in 39 states, Puerto Rico, and Washington, DC. They serve families across 147 cities and towns and in 193 congressional districts. Together, the network serves over 6 million clients, operates budgets totaling \$7.45B, and employs more than 46,000 staff.



While they are independent organizations, Affiliates partner with each other and with UnidosUS to achieve greater impact in local communities and to amplify the significant contributions of Latinos who help move our country forward. This unique partnership enables UnidosUS to reach millions of Latinos every year with critical information, best practices, and support.

Together we:

- Increased housing security among Latinos by providing housing counseling to more than 500,000 people; guiding more than 42,000 families in purchasing their first home; and helping another 60,000 save their homes from foreclosure.
- Educated and mobilized the community to advocate for the Affordable Care Act and permanent tax credits. These efforts resulted in more than 4 million Latinos gaining health coverage and over 4 million Latino working families being lifted out of poverty.
- Reached approximately 35,000 students a year through the charter and community-based schools in our network, which offer culturally and linguistically appropriate instruction, including crucial early childhood education and after-school programs.
- Connected thousands of Latinos to COVID-19 prevention, care, and resources through our 25 Federally Qualified Health Centers.

THE LATINO VOTE: TIMELY POLLS, DATA, AND VOTER ENGAGEMENT INFORM UNIDOS US'S WORK

Hispanics are the second largest voting-age population in the United States. Once registered, more than 80% of Latinos vote in presidential elections, making both voter registration and removing barriers to the voting booth critical. The Latino community is not monolithic, but its voters are overwhelmingly aligned on top priorities, as evidenced by data and polling.

Following nearly two decades of civic engagement efforts resulting in registering almost one million Hispanic voters, in 2022 UnidosUS launched its *Latino Vote Initiative*, designed to conduct year-round voter empowerment and policy engagement activities. UnidosUS's civic engagement work has two goals: (1) to grow Latino political power and agency through voter programs, issue campaigns, and policy advocacy; and (2) to build an accurate understanding of Latino voters' priorities, to hold candidates accountable to these priorities, and to spur more effective outreach and investments.

UnidosUS has engaged voters for two decades:



We've registered nearly one million Hispanic voters, including more than 42,000 in the recent midterm elections.

This is due to several factors: among the **eight in ten Latinos** who are U.S. citizens, **12 million of them are currently eligible to register** and another **one million** per year will turn 18 and become eligible to do so; more than **four million** additional **Latinos will become eligible once naturalized**, and the voter engagement work of organizations like UnidosUS.

In 2022, UnidosUS electoral programs:

- **Registered an additional 42,496 voters.**
- **Reached 577,289 voters** including through live calls, mail, and door-knocking.
- **Reached 3,064,335 people through social media with registration, know-your-rights, and voter and issue information.**
- **Released extensive public opinion research on Hispanic voter perspectives and priorities**, including [national and 8-state polls](#) heading into the midterms and an [election eve poll](#) documenting how and why Hispanics voted nationally and in 11 states.

UnidosUS has forged a multi-year [partnership](#) with *Mi Familia Vota* (MFV, the largest Latino field civic participation operation in the country), to strengthen joint operations in citizenship, voter participation, and policy advocacy in eight states (AZ, CA, CO, FL, GA, NV, PA, TX).



HISPANIC VOTERS: THEIR PRIORITIES AND CONCERNS

Based on extensive research on Hispanic voters, direct contact, and midterm election analysis, there are three important takeaways from the 2022 midterms for candidates, elected officials, and parties:

1. **Hispanics reaffirmed their critical role in shaping the country's political landscape, as voters and as candidates.**
 - As voters, Hispanics were a tipping point in key races for both parties (including in AZ, FL, NV, and PA), underscoring the importance of engaging these voters and speaking to their concerns.
 - As candidates, Hispanics ran successfully. At the federal level, there are 17 new Latino members of Congress from both sides of the aisle.
2. **Hispanic voters sent a wake-up call to both parties.** This cycle was evidence of a slight reversion to the historical mean. The historical pattern for Hispanic voters—in which two-thirds support Democrats, and one-third support Republicans—was largely maintained in this recent cycle, with some notable outliers. Although more recent elections had larger margins of support for Democrats, that margin has now softened, and Republicans did regain some of the ground. Still, Hispanics are sending a message to both parties:
 - **The Latino Message to Democrats:** While polling shows that a majority of Latinos see their values as more aligned with Democratic positions, inflation and midterm headwinds, coupled with uneven or late outreach by Democrats, allowed Republicans to gain some ground. Democrats have ample room to solidify and expand Hispanic support, but they must engage these voters more deeply and earlier while also strengthening their economic message.
 - **The Latino Message to Republicans:** In addition to ongoing outreach, to sustain or increase support among Hispanics, Republicans should be aware that their party's platform is radically out-of-step with Latino voters' priorities in most areas—including on topics like abortion, gun violence, health care, and immigration policies.
 - **To both parties:** [Meaningful engagement with Hispanic voters is critical](#), a fact which is underscored by two considerations: 1) there has always been a swing element among Hispanic voters; 2) and in every election, there will be a significant number of new Latino voters. In 2022, for example, 36% of Hispanic voters were voting in a midterm election for the first time.
3. **Hispanic voters want demonstrated progress on critical issues.** Latino voters generally reject extreme positions and oppose efforts to take away rights—as illustrated by their views on abortion—and want elected officials to work together to make progress on challenges facing our country.

Key issues for Latino voters include:

- On the economic front, inflation, wages, and health care costs were among the top five priorities for Hispanic voters, particularly with housing and rental affordability rising sharply—issues that track with long-standing Latino concerns about the cost of living and ability to make ends meet.
 - o 92% support allowing Medicare to negotiate lower prices on prescription drugs.
 - o 85% support making permanent Medicaid, CHIP, and other assistance implemented during COVID.
 - o 78% support the continuation of housing rental assistance.
 - o 70% support increased and expanded child tax credits.
- On crime and gun violence, Hispanics are overwhelmingly concerned that guns are too easy to access and that elected officials need to act to stop school shootings; 75% support a ban on AR-15 weapons.
- On abortion, the issue for the first time reached the top five priorities; 70% of Hispanic voters support passing a federal law to guarantee access to abortion nationwide.
- While immigration was not among the top five issues, Latino voters strongly believe that Congress should pass legislation to protect DREAMers and support a path to legal status for undocumented immigrants (77%).
- On democracy and access to the ballot box, 89% support passing a new voting rights act to ensure all eligible Americans can participate without barriers (80%+).

UNIDOS US EXPERTS ON HISPANIC VOTERS/CIVIC PARTICIPATION

Clarissa Martinez De Castro, Latino Vote Initiative Vice President. Clarissa works to advance an accurate understanding of Hispanic voters and their priorities and to grow Hispanic civic engagement. A frequent commentator on the Latino electorate and immigration issues on television, radio and print media, she is a graduate of Occidental College and Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, a board member of the [U.S. Vote Foundation](#) and the Fair Elections Center, a [Presidential Leadership Scholar](#), and an [Ad Council](#) Advisory Committee member.



Rafael Collazo, Director of Political Affairs. Rafael leads the external strategy and campaign execution for UnidosUS issue priorities. He also serves as Executive Director of the UnidosUS Action Fund and the UnidosUS Action PAC, where he leads political mobilization work in key states to maximize Latino electoral impact.



Jared Nordlund, Florida State Director. Jared works to advance Hispanic policy priorities in the state and to increase Latino participation in the American political process through voter registration, get-out-the-vote efforts, and issue campaigns. He represents UnidosUS before policymakers, industry representatives, community leaders and other local stakeholders, and coordinates roundtables and community forums. He previously served as Florida Data Manager for America Votes and holds a bachelor's degree in political science from the University of Minnesota.

LATINO ECONOMIC AND HOUSING PRIORITIES FOR THE 118TH CONGRESS

Latinos are drivers of economic dynamism, growth, and prosperity and make disproportionately high contributions to the workforce, the formation of new businesses, and entrepreneurship. At the same time, the economic prosperity and mobility of the Latino community (1) is needlessly limited by historic inequities and lack of opportunity fueled by decades of systemic racism and (2) would be spurred by targeted policies meant to help Latinos achieve equity and wealth in the areas of housing, banking, and income adequacy.

For instance, expanded access to homeownership would grow security and prosperity for millions and help to reduce the racial wealth divide; inclusive and affordable banking could provide people with essential tools to grow financially; and a tax code built around families could boost incomes for millions of people and substantially reduce poverty. The barriers for Latinos in each of these areas include the same barriers shared across lower-income households and unique community-specific barriers such as language and immigration-related challenges. Inclusive policies that lift up households and diminish these dogged challenges promise to unleash Latinos' full economic power while making good on the promise of the American Dream.

Key Facts on the State of Latino Financial Well-Being

- There are [62 million Latinos living in the United States](#), with [buying power soon to exceed \\$2.6 trillion](#).
- As of October 2022, [4.2% of Latinos are unemployed](#), [66% of Latinos participate in the labor force](#), and Latinos that work full-time have a [median annual wage of \\$55,640](#).
- Immigrants, [the majority](#) of whom are Hispanic, make critical contributions as essential workers. During the pandemic, they represented more than [20%](#) of food sector workers, [16%](#) of all health care workers, nearly 30% of physicians, and carried out many of the country's [riskiest jobs](#).
- Just over [50% of Latinos are homeowners](#). In total, Latinos now have [a median wealth of \\$47,600](#).
- Just over [17% of Latinos are living in poverty](#) and [28% of all people in poverty are Latino](#).

Latinos have a higher-than-average labor force participation rate, start businesses at higher rates than their non-Hispanic counterparts, and wield significant purchasing power.



In fact, the **62 million Latinos** living in the United States **have buying power soon to exceed \$2.6 trillion.**

Yet, they remain overrepresented in low-wage occupations with large pay gaps, rampant wage theft, and insufficient labor protections.

I. Improve the Economic Well-Being of Latinos and Other Low-Income Groups by Ensuring That Families Can Thrive

Latinos have a [higher-than-average labor force participation rate](#), start businesses at [higher rates](#) than their non-Hispanic counterparts, and [wield significant purchasing power](#). Yet they remain overrepresented in low-wage occupations with [large pay gaps, rampant wage theft, and insufficient labor protections](#).

They are also the least likely to have access to retirement accounts, [retirement accounts](#), [health care](#), and [paid family and sick leave](#). As a result, Latinos persistently have lower incomes and wealth than other groups. To reduce these inequities and improve the financial well-being of Latinos and their families, Congress should:

- Craft a tax code that reduces poverty among workers and families and that expands economic opportunity. The Child Tax Credit (CTC) expansions implemented in 2021 contributed to a significant decline in child poverty. The expansions should be made permanent and the eligibility of the 675,000 children with an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN), who were denied access to the CTC in 2017, should be restored. The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), which has lifted approximately [5.6 million people—including 3 million children—out of poverty](#) should be strengthened, including by extending the benefit to children of immigrant families.
- Strengthen and enforce policies that provide good quality jobs for Latinos, including by:
 - Passing a national Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) program so low-income Latino workers can take paid time off from work when sick or to care for a new child or for a seriously ill family member.
 - Increasing funding for the U.S. Department of Labor's Wage and Hour Division. Every year, employer violations of wage and overtime obligations, poor record-keeping, and other abuses result in the financial setback of millions of U.S. workers. Latinos are more likely to be victims of wage discrepancies and to work in dangerous occupations than other groups.
 - Increasing access to retirement accounts for Latinos. [More than two-thirds](#) of Hispanic households aren't saving for retirement through their workplace. This is in part due to a combination of factors including [accessibility issues](#), income disparities, and discrimination from jobs that offer retirement savings.
- Center equity in the implementation of programs and services. Support should ensure that Latinos have access to antipoverty programs through community partnerships, grants to build institutional capacity, and evidence-based approaches.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Statement for the record: [Latinos' Need for Paid Family and Medical Leave](#)
- Blog: [For Latino voters, jobs and inflation are key](#)
- Report: [Closing the Latina Wealth Gap](#)
- Blog: [Progress in California on paid family and medical leave provides critical new support for millions of working Latinas](#)

II. Grow Intergenerational Wealth for Latinos through Increased Homeownership

Homeownership is a bedrock of economic mobility and a key mechanism to overcome systemic barriers and unlock Hispanic intergenerational wealth. However, rising home prices and mortgage rates are untenable and disproportionately hurt **Latinos**. For example, prices in Tampa, Miami, and Phoenix—areas of the country with high Latino populations—all saw price increases above average, with many markets seeing increases over 30%. These factors undermine Latino families wishing to own a home and reap the benefits of homeownership.

Data from a recent [poll](#) conducted by UnidosUS and sponsored by Oportun, which looked at the overall financial health of Latinos in AZ, CA, and TX, paint a sobering picture: too many Latinos live on the financial edge and are forced to borrow money in ways that saddle them with debt and limit their potential to save. Low savings and high debt are boxing Latinos out of being able to prepare for homeownership or other wealth-building opportunities that could unleash their economic potential.

To ensure Latinos have a shot at the American Dream through home ownership, Congress should take steps to:

- Improve homebuyer readiness by increasing reliable funding for housing counseling to prepare more Latinos for homeownership.
- Advance and fund policies on down payment assistance, rental assistance, and other financial supports to address systemic wealth and income gaps.
- Expand access to credit by improving language access in the mortgage and credit markets and closing market gaps for Latino homebuyers by increasing the availability of Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) mortgages and supporting households with high debt-to-income ratios.
- Increase housing supply through zoning reforms and innovative housing construction solutions, such as accessory dwelling units and manufactured housing; elevating the impact of private equity investments on Latino homeownership markets; and increased investments in affordable housing.
- Preserve homeownership by improving program rules in foreclosure assistance programs and supporting efforts to make home renovation loans more affordable and readily available to build intergenerational wealth.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Blog: [Policy makers must act to expand Latino homeownership](#)
- Conference presentation: [Homeownership is a Key Driver of Generational Wealth](#)
- Written testimony presented to House Financial Services Committee: [Boom and Bust: Inequality, Homeownership, and the Long-Term Impacts of the Hot Housing Market](#)
- Written testimony presented to the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations: [Where Have All the Houses Gone?](#)
- Survey report: [Latinos Banking and Credit Survey](#)
- Conference presentation: [Addressing Appraisal Bias](#)
- Conference presentation: [The Role of Credit and Special Purpose Credit Programs in Building Wealth](#)

III. Improve Latinos' Access to Safe and Affordable Bank Products through Innovation and Consumer Protections

Access to bank services is critical to financial security and building wealth. However, the recent UnidosUS and Oportun [study](#) found that 15% of respondents lack a deposit account, which is a much higher percentage than the overall unbanked rate of 5.4%. An alarming 42% with an account were charged an overdraft fee—almost four times more than the national rate of 11%. Respondents also reported that they struggle to access credit, with 20% sharing that they have no credit at all. A mere 56% of respondents have a credit card compared to the national rate of 84%. Moreover, approximately 34.5 million Latinos [live in banking deserts](#), areas with an above-average proportion of unbanked individuals.

Improving access to bank services through innovation, increased competition, and government supports, as well as democratic structures that give low-income communities and communities of color more influence in banks' institutional policy decisions, can help low-income people and Latinos to build wealth. Simultaneously, strengthening consumer protections to eliminate predatory practices, limit excessive fees, tackle discrimination, and make banking safer and fairer will prevent extractive practices and protect wealth accumulation. Congress should:

- Modernize and strengthen the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) to include race and ethnicity data in CRA exams, expand opportunities for impacted communities to provide input in CRA examinations, and offer incentives for financial institutions to provide language access services.
- Expand access to safe and affordable bank products by reducing bank fees for low-income people and Latinos. On average, Latinos pay the highest amount in maintenance fees (\$7.67 per month per account) than any other group, and Latino households are charged overdraft fees at higher rates than white households.
- Increase language access and immigrant inclusion in financial services by ensuring that legal documents for financial transactions, online complaint systems, and credit reports are translated and accessible in the consumer's language of preference. Remove barriers to access to bank accounts and credit for immigrants and ITIN-holders.
- Leverage safe and accessible financial technology by incentivizing diverse representation within financial technology (fintechs) and having fintechs work with low-income people and Latinos. Ensure that new and innovative fintech products, including peer-to-peer products, such as Zelle and “buy now, pay later” (BNPL) products are safe and affordable.
- Implement strong consumer protections to shield Latinos who are prime targets for fraud, scams, and abusive or deceptive practices. Establish robust consumer protections for Latinos against abusive lending and collection practices, unsafe or unaffordable financial products, data protection and privacy, and discrimination in our financial system.
- Credit rating system reforms to the current credit scoring algorithm used by the “Big Three” (Equifax, TransUnion, and Experian, as well as by Freddie and Fannie Mac) are needed that consider and reduce systemic racial disparities in income and wealth rather than exacerbate these gaps.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Survey report: [Latinos Banking and Credit Survey](#)
- Written testimony to the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Financial Institutions on [The End of Overdraft Fees? Examining the Movement to Eliminate the Fees Costing Consumers Billions](#)
- Fact sheet: [Overdraft Best Practices for Financial Institutions](#)
- Survey report: [Latinos' Access to Credit Remains Low and Stratified](#)

UNIDOS US'S ECONOMIC AND HOUSING EXPERTS

Susana Barragan, Policy Analyst, Economic Policy Team. Susana focuses on improving language access in financial services, a fairer credit system, and increasing Latinos' access to public benefits. Prior to joining UnidosUS, Susana was an Associate Policy & Research Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children where she produced research to push for more equitable state-level economic policies, such as a state Child Tax Credit (CTC), state-level actions on overdraft fees, and building a more inclusive middle-class. Susana earned a double B.A. in Economics and Human Rights from the University of Connecticut.



Sam Kenney, Senior Housing Policy Analyst, Economic Policy Team. Sam focuses his work on housing, homeownership, and wealth building. Prior to joining UnidosUS, Sam worked with the State Housing Finance Agency of Oregon where he was the policy lead for strategic and legislative initiatives to improve housing stability and build wealth for Oregonians. Sam has additional experience working on education, inclusion, and microfinance initiatives.



Brayan Rosa-Rodriguez, Senior Policy Analyst, Economic Policy Team. Brayan focuses on improving upward economic mobility for Latinos through tax code reforms, improvements to the welfare system, and program interventions that improve job quality. Prior to joining UnidosUS, Brayan served in various manager positions at the Youth Development Institute of Puerto Rico and the Tutoring and Learning Center at Columbia University. Currently, Brayan is an Ed.M. candidate in Economics and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University. Brayan has a master's degree in public administration and policy from the Wagner School at New York University and a bachelor's degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Puerto Rico.



Santiago Sueiro, Senior Policy Analyst, Economic Policy Team. Santiago is an institutional expert on banking issues, focusing on policies that protect low-income consumers from unfair and predatory practices, promote access to safe and affordable bank products, and make the banking system more inclusive. Before joining UnidosUS, Santiago was a Program Manager for the Savings & Financial Capability team at Prosperity Now and worked for the La Ceiba Microfinance Institution in Honduras, where he served as the Program Director. He studied at the University of Mary Washington where he earned a bachelor's degree in Spanish Language and Literature and in International Affairs.



LATINO EDUCATION PRIORITIES FOR THE 118TH CONGRESS

In recent years, Latinos in the U.S. educational system have been making steady gains in academic achievement, high school graduation rates, and postsecondary enrollment. This progress is notable and a testament to the persistence and work of the Latino community and bipartisan backing for policies—like the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)—to support more of our nation’s students. Yet deep inequities remain, and too many young Latinos continue to face barriers to opportunity.

The COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately impacted Hispanic students and their families. We cannot allow hard-earned educational gains to backslide, yet we also know that the pre-pandemic status quo was not working as well as it should. The proportion of Hispanic K-12 students in U.S. schools has increased three-fold, from 9% in 1984 to 28% today, making equity in education more important than ever. Latino students also have skills that are critical to success in the workplace, including the ability to navigate across cultural and linguistic differences. When we invest in the success of Latino students, we are investing in the future of our country.

Key Facts on the State of Latino Education

- Latino students [are projected](#) to represent nearly one-third of K-12 public education students by 2030 and are the largest ethnic group in our nation’s schools.
- [More than three-quarters of the English Learner](#) (EL) population in the United States—5.1 million students—are Latino, and a similar proportion speaks Spanish at home.
- High school graduation rates for Latinos [reached an all-time high](#) in 2019 of nearly 82% and declined by 0.7% in the 2020-21 school year.
- In 2016, [70% of Latino students](#) were the first in their families to enroll in college, compared to 48% of white students.
- At the postsecondary level, [Latino freshman enrollment](#) declined 7.8% in spring 2021 compared to spring 2020—the first decline in Latino enrollment in a decade.
- Among Latino first-time and full-time students at four-year institutions, [59% graduate](#) within six years, compared to 67% of white students.



I. Invest in Latino Child Development, Their Families, and the Early Education Workforce

According to the 2017 National Academies of Sciences report [Promising Futures](#), learning begins before birth, while inequities and disparities in educational outcomes are established in the period from birth to age five. Latino infants are a large and rapidly growing population group, yet many [families struggle](#) to access early care.

Low-income Latino children who attended pre-K or center-based care [enter kindergarten](#) more ready to learn. UnidosUS focus groups of Latino parents also demonstrated their strong interest in child development. However, while Latinos are a growing segment of the child population, they have [the lowest enrollment](#) in early childhood education programs, with 49.5% of Latino three-to-four-year-olds enrolled in programs, compared to 55.5% of their white peers.

UnidosUS calls on Congress to ensure all children have the opportunity for optimal learning and development between birth and kindergarten by taking steps to:

- Fund and evaluate pilot programs encouraging infant/toddler outreach by public schools and collaborations between public schools and early childhood education (ECE) programs serving Latino infants/toddlers.
- Provide all three- and four-year-olds from low- and moderate-income families with access to free, high-quality pre-kindergarten. Early Head Start is woefully underfunded, a majority of eligible children remain unserved, and critical investments are needed to serve more children, particularly dual-language learners.
- Retain, support, and develop Hispanics in the ECE workforce. Congress must strengthen the pipeline by fostering a culturally and linguistically responsive early education workforce; increasing ECE teacher salaries *and* benefits commensurate with the demands and importance of the job; and allocating funding for ECE teacher professional development and degree completion.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Report: [Latino Infants: A Continuing Imperative](#)
- Joint Publication: [Early Childhood Education Amid COVID-19: Rebuilding Better for Black and Latinx Children](#)

II. Federal Funding Must Keep Up with the Rapidly Growing Multilingual Learner Population

Multilingual learners are one of the fastest-growing student populations—increasing 35% between the 2000-01 school year (3,793,764) and the 2018-19 school year (5,115,887). However, funding for Title III of the ESEA (the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which supports English Learners (ELs)) has not kept up. When taking inflation into account, funding has decreased by 24% since 2002.

Lagging funding has caused opportunity gaps further exacerbated by the pandemic. According to the 2022 National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), only 14% of fourth-grade ELs scored at or above the proficient level in math compared to the national average of 29%, and just 10% were at or above proficient in reading compared to the national average of 32%.

UnidosUS calls on Congress to improve education outcomes for ELs and appropriate \$2 billion for Title III, including the following:

- \$100 million to create a discretionary grant program for the development and adoption of native language assessments to leverage the linguistic, cultural, and cognitive resources of ELs and to better inform equitable and higher-level instruction.
- Support for more teachers to attain their English language development or bilingual certification and professional development for teachers of ELs through Title III's National Professional Development program.
- Culturally and linguistically responsive engagement with EL families and support for after school academic and social programs for ELs.
- Innovative programs that support bilingual and dual language education and leverage the unique assets of ELs to promote higher academic and socio-emotional outcomes.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Budget brief: [Investing in English Learners: Federal Recommendations | UnidosUS](#)
- Progress Report: [The House Appropriations Committee Proposes \\$1 Billion in FY23 To Support the Needs of English Learners. Advocates Ask for Double That To Meet the Moment. | UnidosUS](#)
- Title III Letter: [Fiscal Year 2023 appropriations funding for Title III | UnidosUS](#)





III. The Academic Recovery for Latino and Multilingual Learners Is Essential to the Health of Our Country

The pandemic disrupted education across the country as schools closed and classrooms switched to remote learning. While all children were impacted, there is evidence that students of color and low-income students faced the biggest challenges—from lack of internet access to longer school closures and less instructional time.

The most recent NAEP assessment results show the steepest decline in math ever recorded—test scores for eighth graders across all demographics fell in nearly every state. A meager 26% of eighth graders were proficient, down from 34% in 2019. For eighth-grade Latinos, these declines were more significant: [14% were proficient](#), down from 20% in 2019. In a national parent [survey](#) by UnidosUS's Affiliate, National Parents Union, 80% expressed concern over how schools are handling pandemic learning loss and 89% are concerned about how schools are preparing students for the future.

Congress must work to advance our shared goal of creating educational experiences that build on each student's unique strengths and allow them to achieve their full potential.

We must:

- Operationalize assessment data to target funding, supports, and interventions where needed most. Congress must honor the equity guardrails in federal law and ensure compliance with the Every Student Succeeds Act's (ESSA) framework for identifying and supporting low-performing schools.
- Target federal funds provided by the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund to low-income students most in need of educational support as a result of the pandemic. Congress should also triple funding for Title I, Part A, and target funds toward school districts with the highest rates of poverty.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Research report: [Latino Student Success: Advancing U.S. Educational Progress for All](#)
- Progress report: [How Public Charter Schools Have Uplifted Latino Communities Through the Pandemic and Beyond | UnidosUS](#)
- Progress report: [Texas can do more to ensure students recover from pandemic learning loss | UnidosUS](#)



IV. Address the Stubborn Rates of College Completion and Degree Attainment That Threaten Latino Social and Economic Mobility

Within the next decade, Latinos are projected to be one of every five students in higher education in the United States. Pre-pandemic, Latinos had the largest enrollment growth of any other racial or ethnic group. Between 1990 and 2020, Latino enrollment in postsecondary programs increased by an astronomical 372%—from 782,400 to 3.7 million students.

Despite these gains, Latino students—who contend with deeply rooted inequities fueled by decades of systemic racism, discrimination, and one-size-fits-all policy approaches in higher education—lag behind their wealthier and white peers in completing college. As a result, Latinos complete college and graduate with a degree at lower rates, contributing to long-term disparities in debt, wealth accumulation, and economic security. We therefore urge Congress to appropriate at least \$200 million in Postsecondary Student Success Grants (PSSG):

- Colleges need resources to provide evidence-based academic and culturally relevant services that support retention and completion.
- Services should include direct support, career coaching, networking opportunities, and career pathways that serve those from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Latinos and first-generation college students.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Progress Report: [Latino Education Experts Discuss Efforts to Get Latinos Into and Through College and on to More Prosperous Lives | UnidosUS](#)
- Publication: [A Path Forward for Latinos: Laying the Groundwork for Equity in Higher Education](#)
- Fact Sheet: [Examples of Student Success Programs for Latinx Students](#)
- Progress Report: [The Retention and Completion Fund is Key to Supporting Latinx Higher Education Students](#)
- Research Report: [Dreams Interrupted: A Mixed-Methods Study Assessing Latino College Completion](#)
- Fact Sheet: [Latino Trends in Higher Education](#)

UNIDOS US'S EDUCATION EXPERTS



Amalia Chamorro, Director of Education Policy. Amalia manages the education policy team and provides strategic direction for the organization on its federal and state education priorities. Her work focuses on closing opportunity gaps and advancing equity for Latinos from early childhood to postsecondary education.



Roxanne Garza, Education Senior Policy Advisor. Roxanne provides policy and advocacy strategy recommendations related to ensuring the success of Latino students in K-12 and leads our higher education portfolio. Her recent work has focused on college retention and completion, K-12 assessments and accountability, and federal appropriations.



Melina Kiper, Education Senior Strategist. She is responsible for shaping and executing efforts to advance UnidosUS's state education policy agenda in Arizona, California, Florida, and Texas. She also focuses on the impact of federal policy on states, including assessments and ESSER funding.



Robert Stechuk, PhD, Director of Early Childhood Education Initiatives. His work focuses on supporting ECE programs, Latino parents and family members, and the larger ECE field to provide optimal support for the learning and development of Latino children. His most recent work includes conducting focus groups with Latino parents of infants/toddlers to bring their voices, experiences, and expertise into policy agendas and advocacy campaigns.



Tania Villarroel, Senior Policy Analyst, Early Childhood Education. Tania develops and sustains a national advocacy network on behalf of Latino infants, driving a policy agenda that works to eliminate barriers to early childhood education and development for Latino children prenatal to age three years and dual language learners.



LATINO HEALTH AND NUTRITION PRIORITIES FOR THE 118TH CONGRESS

Latinos have made enormous strides securing health coverage since the Affordable Care Act (ACA) took effect. But far too many Latinos remain uninsured. Many Hispanics are ineligible for health programs because of immigration status or because they live in one of the 11 states that still refuse to cover their poorest residents by expanding Medicaid. At the same time, more than half of uninsured Hispanics qualify for health programs but are not enrolled.

Millions of Latinos rely on Medicaid for their health care. But when special COVID-19 coverage requirements end on April 1, 2023—and Medicaid programs begin terminating families for the first time since February 2020—Hispanic communities will suffer extraordinary and unprecedented coverage losses if Medicaid operates as it did before the pandemic.

Federal nutrition programs ward off hunger and health problems for many Hispanic families. But millions of Latinos continue to experience hunger at rates significantly higher than for non-Hispanic whites. Hispanics are far more likely than non-Hispanic whites to contract diet-related chronic diseases like diabetes and obesity.

The Affordable Care Act (ACA):



Expanded health coverage to millions of previously uninsured Latinos, but **17.7% of Latinos still lack insurance**, compared to 8.6% of non-Hispanic whites.

Key Facts on the State of Latino Health

- Although the ACA lowered the number of [uninsured Latinos from 15 million in 2010 to 11 million in 2021](#), 17.7% of Hispanics remain without coverage, compared to 8.6% of non-Hispanic whites.
- More than 6 million uninsured Latinos qualify for health programs but are not enrolled, including 5 million who are eligible for zero-cost coverage through programs like [Medicaid](#) and the [ACA marketplace](#).
- [In 2021, 18 million Latinos relied on Medicaid](#) for their health care. But according to [federal officials](#), a record 4.6 million Latinos are likely to lose Medicaid coverage if the program operates as it did in the past when Medicaid terminations resume in April 2023.
- Despite extraordinary contributions by immigrants during the pandemic, America's health insurance programs continue to discriminate based on immigration status. For example, Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) deny coverage to immigrants for their first five years as lawful permanent residents (LPRs). Nearly 25% of LPRs remain [uninsured](#).
- According to an October 2022 Census Bureau [survey](#), 21% of Latino families with children did not have enough food to eat compared to just 10% of non-Hispanic white families. Although one in six participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) are Hispanic, more [than four million Latinos are eligible for SNAP but do not participate](#).



I. Significantly Reduce the Number of Uninsured Latinos by Enrolling the Six Million Uninsured Latinos Who Already Qualify for Health Programs

Since the Affordable Care Act was signed into law, the number of Latinos without health insurance [fell from 15 million in 2010 to 11 million in 2021](#). Nonetheless, the proportion of uninsured remains twice as high for Hispanics (17.7%) as for non-Hispanic whites (8.6%). Sadly, even though Latinos are more likely to work, they are [much less likely than non-Hispanic whites to receive health benefits on the job](#).

More than 6 million Latinos without health insurance are eligible for but are not enrolled in [Medicaid, CHIP](#), or [Advance Premium Tax Credits](#) (APTC) to buy [private marketplace coverage](#). They include 5 million people who qualify for coverage that would cost them nothing to buy.

UnidosUS calls on Congress to advance policies that would [automatically enroll](#) those eligible into health coverage and that merit [bipartisan support](#).

- Deploy systems for automatically identifying and enrolling uninsured people into zero-cost coverage for which they qualify.
- Enact the “[Easy Enrollment in Health Care Act](#)” or similar legislation, which would automate enrollment nationally based on federal income tax filing. Such a measure could reach a huge share of Hispanics who lack health insurance. An [estimated](#) 93% of uninsured Latino adults filed federal income tax returns in 2020, including 84% of those with incomes below the federal poverty line.
- At minimum, Congress should authorize state pilot projects to demonstrate the full potential of automating uninsured families’ enrollment. While nine states have enacted policies that automate enrollment, technicalities of federal law limit what states can do.

Key Resources:

- [How to Boost Health Insurance Enrollment: Three Practical Steps that Merit Bipartisan Support](#).
- Making Health Insurance Enrollment As Automatic As Possible: [Part 1](#) and [Part 2](#).

II. Millions of Eligible Latinos are in Danger of Losing Medicaid Coverage

In the coming months, Hispanic communities are in danger of experiencing Medicaid losses far larger than any in the [past](#). COVID-19 relief legislation increased federal funding of state Medicaid programs. In exchange, states agreed to pause terminations of health coverage. Both the funding and the uninterrupted coverage were guaranteed through the end of the Public Health Emergency (PHE). As part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023, Congress ended continuous coverage requirements, effective April 1, 2023, and provided that increased federal funding would gradually decrease throughout 2023 and then end. The legislation imposed requirements on states intended to prevent eligible people from losing coverage, required monthly public reporting of redetermination outcomes, and gave the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) increased enforcement authority to hold states accountable.

Starting on April 1, 2023, state and local Medicaid agencies must redetermine eligibility for [more than 90 million people](#). According to the HHS Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE), [4.6 million Latinos will lose Medicaid](#) if Medicaid operates as it did before the pandemic. Two-thirds of the Hispanic families projected to be dropped from the program will remain eligible but will be terminated because of missing paperwork.

To limit the number of people who lose health care despite remaining eligible, state Medicaid programs must use available data to identify as many eligible beneficiaries as possible and keep them enrolled, without any need for families to furnish redundant paperwork. In 2020, nine states (including Alabama, Idaho, Colorado, and Rhode Island) used [data matches to establish eligibility for 75% or more](#) of all Medicaid renewals. Congress and the Biden administration must hold other states accountable to achieve the same performance levels already reached by top-performing states. Otherwise, a foreseeable tragedy will result for millions of Latino families who rely on Medicaid for health care.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Research report: [The Looming Equity Crisis in Children's Health Care](#)
- Research report: [Shrinking the Medicaid Cliff: How Congress Can Prevent Health Equity Disaster by Protecting Eligible Families' Health Care](#)
- Op-ed: [15 Million Americans Are About to Lose Their Health Care. Congress Must Act.](#)
- Blog: [Potential Medicaid loss threatens health care for millions of Latinos](#)
- Article: [To Reduce Coverage Losses, CMS Should Revise Limits On How States Verify Medicaid Eligibility](#)

Medicaid Coverage Threatened:



Worse, when Medicaid eligibility redeterminations begin in April 2023 for the first time since February 2020, an additional **4.6 million Latinos are projected to lose coverage** if Medicaid operates as it did before the pandemic.

Two-thirds of those Hispanic families expected to lose Medicaid **will still be eligible** but will be terminated from Medicaid due to government red tape.

III. End Discrimination Against Immigrants and Their Children in Determining Eligibility for American Health Programs

The COVID-19 pandemic reminded us that immigrants play an essential role in keeping our country running. During the pandemic's darkest days, immigrants stepped up, despite the risk to themselves and their families. As America struggled to keep its grocery store shelves stocked, immigrants made up more than [20%](#) of food sector workers. Immigrants carried out many of the country's [riskiest jobs](#), comprising [16%](#) of all health care workers and nearly 30% of physicians.

In good times and bad, immigrants make [enormous contributions](#) to our economic growth and to the nation. However, many are locked out of health coverage—for example, even lawfully present immigrants must wait five years before qualifying for programs like Medicaid and CHIP. In fact, nearly 25% of lawfully-present immigrants are [uninsured](#), including more than [15%](#) of lawfully-present immigrant children. These discriminatory policies disproportionately harm Latinos, including U.S. citizen children with at least one non-citizen parent, who are more than [twice as likely](#) to be uninsured, compared to children with citizen parents. While 95% of Latino children are citizens, approximately half [live](#) with family members who are immigrants.

Congress must take the following steps to end these discriminatory policies and remove barriers to health coverage based on immigration status:

- Pass the [LIFT the BAR Act](#), which would restore access to federal benefit programs like Medicaid, CHIP, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and SNAP by eliminating the five-year bar and letting all lawfully present immigrants participate in programs for which they qualify based on income.
- Alternately, pass the [HEAL for Immigrant Families Act](#), which would make similar changes, but only for health programs like Medicaid and CHIP. It would also repeal the current prohibition against undocumented immigrants using their own money to buy private health insurance through the ACA Marketplace.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Article: [Health and the Latino Community: A Framework for Assessing Health Reform Proposals](#)
- Article: [How America Can Cross the Finish Line and Finally Guarantee Health Care to All Children](#)
- Fact Sheet: [Supporting People with DACA and Boosting Our Economic Recovery by Extending Access to Affordable Health Care](#)
- Letter: [UnidosUS Comment Letter on Public Health Insurance Option Design](#)

IV. Improve the Health of Hispanic Families and Children by Increasing Access to Nutritious Food

Far too many people in America, including millions of Latino families and children, lack consistent and affordable access to nutritious food. Before the pandemic began, [17% of Latino families](#) with children experienced access barriers to adequate food. For example, Census Bureau [data](#) from October 2022 show that 21% of Hispanic families with children sometimes or often do not have enough food to eat—more than twice the 10% of non-Hispanic white families who report similar food deprivation.

Latino adults and children also experience [higher rates of diet-related adverse health outcomes and diseases](#), including obesity, diabetes, and hypertension. In 2019 alone, cardiovascular diseases were linked to the deaths of nearly [60,000 Latinos](#). Federal nutrition programs, such as SNAP, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and the National School Lunch Program (NSLP), are essential tools for improving health among Latino children and families, but Latinos struggle to access them. More than [four million Latinos](#) are eligible for SNAP but are not enrolled.

Moreover, WIC participation among eligible participants has [declined over the past decade](#). These gaps result from barriers to program participation, the high cost of healthy foods, and monthly SNAP benefits that fall short of letting families put enough food on the table for the month.

Food Insecurity



21% of Hispanic families with children are hungry, compared to 10% of non-Hispanic white families.

This is due, in part, to the fact that 4 million Latinos are eligible for SNAP, but face access barriers that prevent their enrollment. Our community faces similar struggles to access WIC and school lunches.

Congress must take the following steps to combat hunger and provide healthy food options for millions of families and children:

- Pass the [Healthy Meals, Healthy Kids Act](#) to increase children's access to federal food assistance programs, including school meals, WIC, and summer substitutes for school meal programs.
- Pass a strong and inclusive Farm Bill that incorporates provisions from:
 - The [Closing the Meal Gap Act](#), which improves SNAP benefit adequacy, extends SNAP benefits to U.S. citizens who live in the territories, and eliminates eligibility limits and unrealistic barriers to SNAP participation.
 - The [SNAP PLUS Act of 2021](#), which expands SNAP customers' choices, including by repealing current restrictions on using SNAP to buy hot prepared foods.
 - [The Improving Access to Nutrition Act](#), which eliminates SNAP's arbitrary three-month time limit for adults without children and helps full-time workers at low-wage jobs afford the food they need to stay healthy.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Blog: [Congress must seize the moment to improve access to affordable and nutritious food for Latino kids](#)
- Blog: [It's past time to lift the bar on food assistance programs](#)
- Blog: [No one should have to sacrifice food to pursue higher education](#)
- Blog: [Latinos remain disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. USDA can make progress on equity and racial justice](#)
- Letter: [UnidosUS Comments on the White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health](#)

UNIDOS US'S HEALTH EXPERTS

Stan Dorn, Director of Health Policy. Stan manages the health policy team and provides technical expertise and policy direction for the organization on its federal and state health priorities. He has more than 35 years of experience working at the state and federal levels protecting and promoting health coverage and care for low-income people and communities of color. Prior to working at UnidosUS, Stan directed the National Center for Coverage Innovation at Families USA and served as Senior Fellow at the Urban Institute's Health Policy Center, Health Division Director at the Children's Defense Fund, and Managing Attorney at the National Health Law Program's Washington office. Stan is a graduate of Harvard College and the University of California at Berkeley School of Law.



Jeanette Contreras, Project Director for Health Equity Campaigns. Jeanette provides the vision and strategic goals for UnidosUS' health equity portfolio, developing policies that improve access to health care for Latinos. She is a seasoned health spokesperson with 20 years of experience in health policy and consumer advocacy. She holds a bachelor's degree in political science from California State University Los Angeles and a master's degree in public policy from American University.



Umailla Fatima, Policy Analyst, Health Policy Project. Umailla leads our food policy work and efforts to improve food security, nutrition, and their associated health outcomes in the Latino community. Before joining UnidosUS, Umailla honed her passion for improving health outcomes in underserved communities after working in an emergency department serving immigrant and low-income patients. She holds bachelor's degrees in Public Policy and Neurobiology and Physiology from the University of Maryland.



Matthew Snider, Policy Advisor, Health Policy Project. Matthew focuses on policies involving health coverage and care for Latino families, including improving access and affordability, removing barriers for immigrant and mixed-status families, and addressing longstanding racial and health inequities. Before joining UnidosUS, he worked on Medicare reform with the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. Matthew holds a B.A. in anthropology from the University of South Carolina and a J.D. from Syracuse University College of Law.



LATINO IMMIGRATION AND INTEGRATION PRIORITIES FOR THE 118TH CONGRESS

The United States is long overdue for reforms to our outdated immigration system. We need to modernize our immigration laws to ensure America effectively manages its borders, remains globally competitive, and fully harnesses the hard work and homegrown talent of Dreamers and other long-term immigrants for the benefit of society and all Americans. We have a moral obligation to build a secure and functioning immigration system. Nearly 6 million U.S. citizen children live in households of mixed immigration status. Their lives and futures are as intimately connected to the hardships of their immigrant family members as they are to our collective social and economic prosperity.

The contributions of immigrants to the United States throughout our history have been great—and undeniably visible throughout the pandemic. An estimated 5.2 million immigrant essential workers contribute as health care workers, along the food chain in the fields, meatpacking plants, grocery stores, and restaurants, in child and elder care, and in other critical positions. Among these essential workers are [203,000](#) holders of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)—a community of nearly 700,000 young people who were raised here but whose lives and livelihoods could be threatened by an anticipated court decision in the coming months that would end the DACA program, revoke their ability to work, and make them deportable. We should permanently resolve the status of the long-term immigrant population and stabilize our workforce—not expel good workers from their jobs and damage our nation’s recovery. Clearly it is time for Congress to act.

Immigrants have strong family and economic ties in the United States.



Today, more than 40 million people living in the United States were born in another country, nearly 14% of the population.

Around 9 million immigrants are undocumented, with very few legal paths to permanent status.

Key Facts on the State of Immigration

- Today, [eight out of ten Latinos](#) in the United States are American citizens. The ninth out of ten is a lawful permanent resident. Still, more than half of Latinos know someone who is undocumented, underscoring the deep personal connection many have to the issue and its intersection with other community priorities.
- Broken immigration policies—and the often uninformed and harmful rhetoric about them—undermine the talents and futures of the nearly [6 million U.S. citizen](#) children who live with an undocumented family member. **Today, 26% of U.S. children live in immigrant families.**
- Among these are DACA youth. Due to court challenges, about [600,000](#) active DACA holders are at risk of losing protections if Congress fails to act. DACA [is popular](#) in the United States, as 74% of Americans support permanent legal status for immigrants brought to the United States as children.
- Undocumented immigrants have [deep roots](#) in our country. Nearly two-thirds of the overall undocumented community has lived in the United States for 10 years or more; more than 22% have been here for more than 20 years.
- Immigrants were nearly [one in five individuals](#) in the essential workforce during the pandemic and [three of four](#) undocumented immigrants were essential workers—which is a reminder of their enormous contributions to the U.S. economy and the nation.
- Employers experienced [labor shortages in key sectors](#) of the economy in 2022. While the pandemic explains some of these disruptions, it is also true that since 2016, there has been a series of dramatic year-over-year [drops in net migration](#) at a time when the [U.S. birth rate](#) has dipped 20% since 2007.

Nearly two-thirds of undocumented people:



have lived in the United States for 10+ years, and more than one-fifth have been here for 20+ years.

6 million U.S. citizen children live with an undocumented family member.



I. Modernize Our Immigration System to Strengthen Our Borders, Families, and Economy

Immigration policy is inextricably linked to America's biggest and most consequential national projects—from our infrastructure investments to developing technologies to fight climate change and the next global health crisis. During the 117th Congress, the nation made considerable bipartisan investments to modernize our aging infrastructure and lay the foundation for tackling the challenges of the future, including climate change. As these policies are implemented, Congress must provide our economy with the tools to achieve success, including an immigration system that is fair, functioning, and flexible enough to meet the country's needs for workers and innovators.

A modern, flexible, and fair immigration system should provide avenues for *legal* immigration to supplement the domestic labor supply—not substitute for it— while strengthening the rights of all workers. When immigrants come legally with visas and not illegally with smugglers, our enforcement tools would more effectively secure and manage our southern border. A functioning immigration system must also address the standing of the undocumented population, especially those with strong ties to the United States, including those with DACA status. Congress must provide avenues for these individuals to get right with the law, earn legal status and U.S. citizenship, and fully integrate into the fabric of the United States.

UnidosUS calls on Congress to pass immigration reforms that incorporate long-term immigrants into our workforce, our economy, and our nation.

- Pass the American Dream & Promise Act, or similar legislation, and provide permanent relief and a path to citizenship to Dreamers, immigrant youth at risk of losing DACA, and those with Temporary Protective Status (TPS).
- Update laws still on the books to ensure fairness and family unity as cornerstones of our immigration system, like the immigrant registry (the century-old legal means for undocumented immigrants to secure lawful status based on their long-standing presence in the United States) and Section 245(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act (which allows undocumented immigrants to adjust status through family-based immigration).
- Reject “enforcement only” immigration proposals that alone fail to reduce unauthorized immigration, establish enforceable legal avenues for immigrants to come to work or join family, or resolve the status of the long-term undocumented with deep ties in our country. A functioning legal immigration system is needed to better manage our borders and ports of entry into the United States.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Position paper: [Beyond the Border: Family Separation in the Trump Era](#)
- Issue Briefs: State Profiles of “A Generation at Risk,” available for [California](#); [Texas](#); [Florida](#); [Arizona](#); [Illinois](#)
- Position paper: [A Generation at Risk the Impact of Immigration Enforcement on UnidosUS-Affiliated Classrooms and Educators](#)

II. Ensure Our Nation's Safety Net Serves Everyone, Including Immigrants on Whom We Depend

As the country emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, one lesson is clear: Latinos and immigrants stepped up for their country when their country needed them most. Latinos accounted for [70%](#) of the essential workforce that responded to the COVID-19 crisis, including many immigrants: an estimated 5.5 million undocumented immigrants worked as essential workers.

Unfortunately, the pandemic also exposed long-standing structural barriers that contributed to many Latinos not getting the help they needed to stay afloat during difficult times. America must update its national emergency and safety net playbook to ensure that no one is left behind, including those who are helping to keep critical sectors of the economy afloat during a national crisis.

- Repeal restrictions like the so-called “5-year bar,” which bars new lawful permanent residents and other immigrants in lawful status from accessing the safety net when they fall on hard times, especially during national emergencies. Numerous surveys and polls over the past two years make clear that such rules cause fear and confusion as well as lead to misinformation, which impacted vaccination rates among Latinos and discouraged many from accessing [critical public supports](#) for which they were eligible.
- Allow families of mixed immigration status to access the safety net, especially during national emergencies. U.S. citizen and legal permanent resident children should not be punished with hunger, homelessness, or poverty because of the immigration status of their parents or family members.

Key UnidosUS Resources:

- Student publication: [The Great American Pandemic Recovery: Tackling Systems of Inequality that Impede Full Latino Inclusion in the COVID-19 Response](#) (Harvard Kennedy School Journal of Latino Policy)
- Data dashboard: [By the Numbers: Latinos in the Time of Coronavirus Dashboard](#)
- Article: [Restoring an Inclusionary Safety Net For Children In Immigrant Families: A Review Of Three Social Policies](#)
- Position paper: [The Latino Community in the Time of COVID-19: Prospects for an Equitable Recovery One Year Later](#)

Around 3 million of the undocumented:



are “**DREAMers**” who grew up in the United States; of those, only about **600,000 are in the DACA program** due to eligibility rules and court action barring first-time applications.

More than **200,000 DACA holders** and **3 of 4** of the overall **undocumented are essential workers**.



III. Improve the Futures of Low-income Immigrant Families and Children through Investments in Integration

Immigrants and their children need access to programs that provide knowledge and skills that facilitate their successful long-term civic, social, and economic integration in the United States. For example, the adult education system meets less than 4% of adult learner needs in the country. Therefore, a different program vehicle must provide immigrants and refugees with the English, integration knowledge, and skills necessary to thrive in the United States.

For aspiring citizens, access to naturalization is the bedrock to full inclusion in our country. Given the complexities of U.S. immigration law, policies that support immigration legal services—and provide the necessary federal funding—to support low-income immigrants in their pursuit of U.S. citizenship are critical.

Congress must invest in programs that facilitate the full integration and inclusion of our nation's aspiring Americans.

- Increase funding for the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Citizenship and Integration Grant program that provides federal funds to nonprofit entities to provide low-cost assistance to eligible permanent residents in preparing and applying for U.S. citizenship.
- Speed up the Department of Justice's (DOJ) processing of nonprofit applications for the Recognition and Accreditation (RA) program, which allows the organizations to provide quality and affordable immigration services to those applying for citizenship. DOJ's application processing timeline has increased from two to four months to up to a year. More staff is needed to timely process nonprofits' pending RA applications so they are able to provide life-changing counsel to more low-income immigrants.
- Streamline the naturalization process by setting reasonable processing periods and ensuring that U.S. citizenship remains accessible to eligible immigrants. Eliminate existing procedural and affordability barriers and provide applicants with appropriate educational and institutional support throughout the process.



- Non-English-speaking families and those with Dual Language Learners (DLL) comprise a large and growing share of all families with young children, but they still are not adequately served by existing programs. Congress should invest resources to better target and serve parents and young children who face multiple barriers to accessing health and early childhood services and thereby lift the integration trajectories of both generations. In addition, a public investment in community-based organizations that address the needs of immigrants and refugees not currently met in the adult education system is also critically needed.

UNIDOS US'S IMMIGRATION POLICY AND IMMIGRANT INTEGRATION EXPERTS



Laura Vazquez, Associate Director, Immigrant Integration. Laura works with UnidosUS Affiliates to expand and sustain their immigration legal services programs and provide additional supports for immigrants and their families.



Nicole Chavez, Immigration Policy Analyst. Nicole conducts research and design on UnidosUS' policy recommendations on immigration, with a focus on ICE interior enforcement and social safety net access for mixed-status families. She recently co-authored a report on the holistic impact of interior enforcement efforts on the children of immigrants. Prior to working at UnidosUS, her work involved grassroots advocacy for migrant workers and legal support for asylum seekers in ICE detention.

LATINO CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL JUSTICE PRIORITIES FOR THE 118TH CONGRESS

For the 118th Congress, UnidosUS is committed to a civil rights and civil justice agenda that creates and expands existing opportunities for Latinos to serve as active and visible participants and leaders in our democratic and political processes, the economy, and public and social discourse. Our current civil rights portfolio emphasizes work in three major areas: fair and equal access to voting, digital equity, and the right to privacy.

The 2020 Census capped off two decades of explosive growth experienced by Latino communities, bolstering the American economy and enriching America's cultural fabric. Yet gains in Latino political power and influence are not keeping pace with the community's increases in earning and purchasing power, entrepreneurship, or educational attainment. Latinos are only about 1% of all local and federal [elected officials](#), although they are 18.5% of the general population.

For too many Latino families, the internet, technological devices, and/or digital skills remain out of reach at home. In addition, Latinos are disproportionately impacted by the [digital divide](#), undermining pre-pandemic gains that Latino communities made in [economic opportunity](#), [health care access](#), and [education](#), adding obstacles to the community's pandemic recovery.

Latinos, like everyone else, have shifted online to shop, learn, earn, participate in civic life, create community, and access jobs, financial products, and business opportunities. For these reasons, Latinos need federal data privacy and security to address online discrimination and bias and the real-world impacts that result.

Key Facts about Latino Civil Rights and Civil Justice

- Between 2010 and 2020, the Latino population [grew](#) by 23%, [accounting](#) for 51% of the total population growth in the United States overall.
- One in five Americans [identify](#) as Latino, and one in four Americans under the age of 18 [identify](#) as Latino.
- One million Latinos [turn](#) 18 each year, making Latinos the youngest among their peers on average.
- Just prior to the pandemic, about 18 million Latinos lacked home broadband internet. By March 2021, that number grew to 21 million Latinos—only 65% of Latinos reported having home internet, [compared with](#) 80% of whites and 71% of Black people.
- Latino communities also face “[digital redlining](#),” or a systemic underinvestment by internet service providers in providing service to neighborhoods that are lower-income and often are communities of color. This results in higher costs for lower quality (or slower) service.



I. Latinos Need Restoration of the Voting Rights Act and Related Democracy Protections, as the Right to Vote is Fundamental

The 2022 midterm elections saw renewed voter suppression activities and related efforts, including misinformation. Today's tactics are making the voting process even more inaccessible for Latino voters.

Congress should:

- **Reauthorize and restore the Voting Rights Act (VRA).** Provisions in the [For the People Act](#) ensure fairness and accessibility in our elections by standardizing early voting and voting by mail, improving and promoting access to voter registration, ending congressional gerrymandering, overhauling federal campaign finance laws, and more. Measures in the [John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act](#) protect voters by restoring key anti-discrimination protections.
- **Reform the Electoral Count Act (ECA).** The [Electoral Count Reform Act of 2022](#) would ensure that electoral votes tallied by Congress accurately reflect each state's public vote for President. This legislation would replace ambiguous provisions of current law with clear procedures that maintain appropriate state and federal roles in selecting the President and Vice President of the United States.



Out of 21 million Latinos:



Only 65% of Latinos reported having home internet, compared with 80% of whites and 71% of Black people.

Stable, high-speed internet is a prerequisite to nearly every dimension of daily life. **Without it, Hispanics' experience with longstanding inequities** caused by barriers to health care, education, employment, civic participation, information and news, and essential government services, **will only get worse.**

II. Latinos Face Multiple Barriers to Home Broadband Internet Adoption, Restricting Their Access to Opportunity

As Congressman John R. Lewis [said](#), internet access is “the civil rights issue of the twenty-first Century.” Stable, high-speed internet is a prerequisite for nearly every dimension of daily life.

The inverse is also true: the absence of broadband access worsens longstanding inequities by adding additional barriers to accessing health care, education, employment, civic participation, information and news, and essential government services. UnidosUS supports policies that expand Latino access to stable, high-speed home broadband connection; appropriate and capable devices like a laptop or desktop; quality technical support; and successful adoption and integration of digital skills.

Congress should:

- Support the [Digital Equity Act](#) and the [Broadband Equity, Access, & Deployment \(BEAD\) Program](#) administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Agency (NTIA) within the Department of Commerce. These programs were part of the [2021 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's](#) \$65 billion investment to fund broadband infrastructure deployment, with an emphasis on areas that have been historically un- and under-served.

III. Latinos Need Federal Data Privacy and Security to Address Online Discrimination and Bias and the Real-World Impacts That Result

Digital platforms' automated technologies [use algorithms](#) to process user data that can make behavioral predictions, influence and modify user behaviors, and segment populations according to protected characteristics, including race/ethnicity and gender, in [harmful ways](#). Such technologies can determine access to opportunities in housing, education, employment, health care, insurance, credit, and more. Historical non-discrimination and civil rights protections, such as the Fair Housing Act or the Equal Credit Opportunity Act, do not effectively address rights in digital marketplaces.

Congress should:

- **Enact privacy legislation that prevents discrimination and protects civil rights online.** The United States currently lacks a comprehensive federal data and information privacy law. The [American Data Privacy and Protection Act](#) (2022) would protect civil rights through anti-discrimination protections, data minimization, transparency and auditing requirements, and provide a regulatory home for such activities within the Federal Trade Commission.

UNIDOS US'S CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL JUSTICE EXPERTS



Claudia Ruiz, Senior Civil Rights Analyst, works with cross-cutting civil rights issues ranging from voting rights to policing reform to digital equity & tech equity/accountability. Claudia advocates for policy reforms and civil rights protections that promote equity and inclusion for the Latino community. Claudia is an alumna of Brown University and the University of Miami School of Law.



TRANSFORMING THE ECONOMIC TRAJECTORY FOR LATINOS THROUGH HOMEOWNERSHIP

Because everyone needs a home. To ensure that Latino families can achieve their homeownership goals and to maximize the economic potential of this growing demographic, UnidosUS is undertaking an ambitious goal: **to create 4 million new Latino homeowners and significantly increase the Latino homeownership rate by 2030.**

Homeownership helps build intergenerational wealth and is a critical measure of how well the country's socioeconomic system supports American families. It increases access to opportunities in education, employment, and health, forming a basis for prosperity and well-being. For many Latino families, homeownership also represents safety, stability, and inclusion. An overwhelming majority of aspiring Latino homeowners express strong motivation to buy a home within the next five years and [data show](#) that over 8 million Latinos are mortgage-ready.

Latino homeownership drives the housing sector. Hispanic Americans are a growing and influential force in the U.S. housing market. Because they are the only demographic group projected to increase homeownership rates over the next 20 years, the success of the American housing market is tied to the success of Latino homeowners. But demographics are not destiny, and the current housing market conditions disproportionately hurt the prospects of Latinos. Specific steps are needed from political leaders and policymakers to realize the potential of Latino homebuyers and unleash their contributions.

Our HUD-approved housing counseling intermediary, Wealth and Housing Alliance ([UWHA](#)) Network, is the nation's largest network of community-based organizations working to empower Latino wealth-building through homeownership. Leveraging UWHA and the relationships with our nearly 300 Affiliate partners and the Raza Development fund, **UnidosUS is uniquely positioned to lead a Latino-led homeownership movement through robust programmatic actions, policy improvements, and community engagement.**

1. **Expand UnidosUS program impact.** We will scale our nationally recognized and culturally relevant interventions, including housing counseling and training, to prepare families for homeownership, build a homeownership pipeline, and sustain Latino homeownership.
2. **Drive meaningful policy change to improve outcomes for Latinos across the homeownership lifecycle.** We are working to transform the policy environment by removing systemic barriers—including barriers to credit, lack of housing supply, and unfair home valuations—and promoting policies that enable Latinos to buy a home.
3. **Support applied research into barriers and opportunities.** We are partnering with researchers to expand academic literature on the Latino mortgage, development, and home purchase markets and widely disseminate our findings to develop innovative policy solutions that reduce barriers to Latino homeownership.
4. **Spreading the word.** We are sharing the story of Latino homeownership, including the perceptions and dreams of Latinos and the Latino community.

Our housing policy goals are an integral part of our economic agenda.



UNIDOS US WORK IN THE STATES

Currently, UnidosUS staff lead policy change efforts at the state level and support the federal work in four of the five states with the highest number of Latinos in the United States: California, Arizona, Texas, and Florida. Work at the state level is essential, because equitable and effective federal legislation and regulations are important but will be insufficient to eliminate systemic and structural barriers that impede the advancement of Latinos.

State-level efforts are both informed by and informing of our federal work, enriching our overall understanding of policy and strengthening our policy recommendations.

Employing staff in states where many U.S. Latinos live and work allows us to:

- Leverage lessons learned from state and local policy initiatives for broader, federal application. States often serve as incubators of innovative policy ideas that, once tested, could be scaled to benefit Latinos and the nation.
- Build momentum toward positive national change for Latinos in the core policy areas described here, such as securing health care and coverage, improving economic standing and empowerment, increasing access to high-quality education, and welcoming immigrants.
- Play defense against harmful state-level policies that pose a potential local or national threat to Latinos, such as initiatives that limit access to the social safety net, undermine civil rights, or attack immigrants and their families.
- Respond to circumstances on the ground, such as when UnidosUS Affiliates or the Latino community are seeking support to respond to state or local matters including ballot initiatives, natural disasters, hate crimes, or tragedies like the school shooting of children in Uvalde, Texas.

We accomplish our state and local work by focusing on three core activities:

- Conducting advocacy in support of national or state issue campaigns to change policy.
- Building advocacy capacity within our Affiliate Network.
- Carrying out voter registration and civic engagement activity.

Our work often includes local events, trainings, and roundtables or town halls with Affiliates, partners, and federal policymakers. If we can be of service to your district or state-level efforts or initiatives, please be in touch.



