

Latino Mental Health: Key Factors and Challenges

Millions of Americans struggle daily with anxiety, depression, suicidality, and other mental health concerns. The unique stressors associated with the COVID-19 pandemic continue to have a psychological impact, though the full extent of its effect requires additional research. Latinos* are not immune to the national mental health crisis, and when combined with longstanding factors affecting mental health and barriers to care, Latinos are often disproportionately at risk.

Beyond COVID-19, additional new factors are negatively affecting Latinos' mental health. As policymakers act to address the national mental health crisis, it is essential that new policies fully account for the drivers and barriers most impacting Latinos in order to meaningfully reduce health inequities.

This fact sheet describes the state of Latino mental health and identifies key drivers behind mental health concerns among Latinos.

Many Latinos struggle with mental health concerns at rates comparable to or greater than other people in America.

- Between 2019 and 2020, 46% of Latino adults reported some symptoms of anxiety or depression, compared to 41% of non-Hispanic white adults.¹
- Nearly one-third of Latino youth reported that their mental health was most of the time or always not good (including stress, anxiety, and depression) in 2021.²
- One of the highest increases in suicide death rates in the period from 2010 to 2020 was among Hispanic people (27%), more than twice the increase among non-Hispanic whites.³
- Latina mothers are more likely to struggle with post-partum depression at rates far higher than non-Hispanic women (as much as 40% more likely, according to one survey).⁴
- While suicide death rates between 2019 and 2020 decreased overall, the rate among Hispanic men increased by 5.7%. In 2019, suicide was the second leading cause of death for Hispanics aged 15-34.⁵

* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. This document may also refer to this population as "Latinx" to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions that are present in the community.

Throughout the pandemic, Latinos have faced the stress of disproportionate COVID-19 exposure.

- Latinos are overrepresented in frontline work associated with higher risks, such as less access to adequate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).⁶
- At the same time, working-age (30-69) Hispanics have died from COVID-19 at higher rates than whites in the same age groups.⁷
- During the pandemic, Latinos also reported greater fear of workplace exposure to the virus as a source of stress and worry than the overall population.⁸

Economic disadvantages create stressful living conditions.

- Food insecurity and economic hardship have only been exacerbated by the pandemic, particularly among Latinos. Between 2019-2020, food insecurity increased among Latinos (15.8% to 19.1%) while it decreased among non-Hispanic whites.⁹
- In 2020, Hispanic adults were more likely to report stress about not having enough food (22.7%) or stable housing (20.7%) than white adults (11.9% and 9.2%, respectively).¹⁰

Insurance gaps exacerbate mental health problems.

- In 2021, approximately 18% of Latinos were uninsured.¹¹
- Adults without health insurance report a higher overall stress than those who are insured, and one survey found that, in 2018, Latinos are the most likely to be stressed by lack or loss of health insurance coverage.¹²
- During the pandemic, Latinos have also reported greater stress or worry about getting needed health care services than non-Hispanic whites.¹³
- In 2021, Latinos with any mental illness were far less likely to receive care than non-Hispanic whites (36.1% vs. 52.4%).¹⁴

Social inequalities related to sexuality, gender, and immigration status also affect mental health, especially for youth.

- Anti-immigrant rhetoric under the Trump administration correlated with higher self-reported instances of worrying about immigration policy as well as mental health symptoms associated with anxiety and depression among Latino youth, especially those with parents who are undocumented and/or migrant seasonal farm workers.¹⁵
- Latino LGBTQ youth are 30% more likely to attempt suicide than non-Latino LGBTQ youth.¹⁶
- Attempts to cancel the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (along with continued uncertainty about its status) produce stress and depression among recipients.¹⁷

The lack of community-informed research poses a challenge to developing culturally relevant interventions and programs. In order to produce meaningful results and reduce the disparities described above, policymakers must understand the particular needs of Latinos, as well as identify and invest in effective, culturally appropriate mental health models and services.¹⁸

Future work will explore obstacles Latinos face in accessing mental health care, as well as policy recommendations for alleviating the inequities described above. As the country emerges from the pandemic, it is critical that policymakers meaningfully address the mental health crisis that COVID-19 only exacerbated.

About UnidosUS

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.

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

Endnotes

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