



UC Davis report on Latino mental health-care disparities

From 2010-12, the UC Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities engaged Latinos in 13 cities and two high schools throughout California – from Chico to San Diego – in discussions about mental health care. The perspectives of Latinos who participated in community forums in each location are now documented in a comprehensive report called **Community-Defined Solutions for Latino Mental Health Care Disparities**, which addresses barriers to access and utilization of mental health services and solutions to resolving these mental health-care disparities.

Funded by the California Department of Mental Health as part of the California Reducing Disparities Project, the report is the first to employ a community-based, participatory approach to defining strategies the State of California can use to address the mental health-care needs of Latinos – the largest ethnic minority group in the state.

The Latino Mental Health Concilio

UC Davis united a team called the Latino Mental Health Concilio – passionate Latino community leaders and advocates dedicated to serving and understanding the needs of Latino communities – to lead the community forums. Participants included mental health-care consumers and their families, mental health-care providers, county mental health ethnic services managers, and representatives of juvenile justice and education. A total of 553 Latino voices contributed to the report.

What they found

Latinos in California, including Latino youth, are susceptible to social and economic stressors related to acculturation issues, poverty, poor housing, inadequate transportation, abuse, trauma, language barriers, social exclusion and discrimination, which contribute to mental health conditions such as depression, alcohol and drug abuse, and anxiety disorders. Many Latinos do not seek treatment due to stigma or lack of information about the importance of mental health care. Others do not have access to the services necessary for managing mental health conditions. When Latinos do reach out for help, they often face a “one size fits all” approach to mental health care that does not consider their cultural needs or language. Untreated mental health symptoms exacerbate over time, eventually deteriorating relationships, employability and daily life.

Strategies for reducing barriers, increasing access

The report includes a total of 31 recommendations for changing the mental health landscape for Latinos in California, including:

- Educate Latino children in schools about mental health symptoms to improve early detection and treatment.

For more information, contact the UC Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities at 916-703-9211 or e-mail crhd@ucdmc.ucdavis.edu. The report is available at www.ucdmc.ucdavis.edu/crhd.



- Leverage resources across community-based organizations and social services agencies to expand access to mental health treatment.
- Offer mental health services after work hours and on weekends.
- Use mainstream and Latino media to raise awareness about mental health conditions and symptoms and to reduce stigma associated with seeking treatment.
- Develop a mental health-care workforce prepared to address the cultural and linguistic needs of Latinos.
- Provide mental health services where other health-care and social services are offered.
- Instill in mental health providers the importance of communicating with mental-health consumers in ways that acknowledge their unique beliefs about mental health, spirituality and traditions.
- Promote mental health utilizing the strengths of Latino communities, including families, religious leaders, indigenous community leaders, community *pláticas* or conversations and *promotoras* – community health leaders that can “broker” access to care.
- Recognize the diversity of the Latino community and conduct research to define the best evidence-based approaches to providing mental health treatment for sub-groups of Latinos based on region of origin, history and traditional beliefs.

Latinos participated in community forums conducted in cities throughout the state to identify barriers and recommend community-defined solutions to reducing Latino mental health disparities. The participants included close to 60 students at high schools in Huntington Park and Cerritos and at California State University, Dominguez Hills, in Carson to identify issues specific to academic settings.

Led by an expert in Latino mental health

The lead author of the report is **Sergio Aguilar-Gaxiola**, professor of internal medicine, director of the UC Davis Center for Reducing Health Disparities and a renowned expert on mental health in ethnic populations. He conducted one of the largest studies to date on mental health disorders in California’s Mexican-origin population and outlined ways to increase access to mental health services among the Central Valley’s low-income, underserved, rural populations. Aguilar-Gaxiola is recognized for conducting community-engaged studies to identify health and mental health disparities; translate mental health research into practical information for the use and benefit of consumers, their families, health-care professionals, service providers and policymakers; and inform decision-making and guide health care at the local, state and national levels.

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