Population: Hispanics/Latinos

The U.S. Hispanic/Latino community is made up of people from many different nations and races and while many have lived in the U.S. for many generations, others are recent immigrants. Many face inequities in socioeconomic status, education, and access to health and human services.

- Latinos make up about 15% of the U.S. population and are the fastest growing minority – expected to make up nearly one-fourth of the population by 2050. (1)
- Almost 2/3 of U.S. Hispanics are Mexican Americans.
- Nationally, 33% of Hispanics are uninsured, compared to 16% percent of all Americans. (2)
- Among Spanish-speaking people in the U.S., more than 13 million speak English “not well” or “not at all” (3)

Mental Health Status, Use of Services, and Disparities

- Rates for most mental disorders among Latinos are similar to that of the overall population. However rates vary among Latino sub-groups, and rates for most mental disorders are higher for US-born Latinos than for Latino immigrants. For example, one study found that Puerto Ricans had the highest overall prevalence rate of mental illness among the Latino ethnic groups assessed. (4)

- Studies have shown that older Hispanic adults and Hispanic youth are especially vulnerable to the stresses of immigration and acculturation. (5)
- More Latino youth have pervasive feelings of sadness and hopelessness than whites (36% versus 26%) and more attempt suicide (10% versus 6% of whites). (6) Hispanic youth are less likely than non-Hispanic youth to use alcohol or illicit drugs. (7)
- Attitudes about mental illness and mental health services can affect the use of services. For example, among some Latinos, depression may be mistaken for nervousness, tiredness or a physical ailment, and may be viewed as something temporary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Percent uninsured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AI/ANs</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African Americans</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Hawaiian/PI</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White (not-Hispanic)</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Census, 2008
Among Hispanics with a mental disorder, fewer than 1 in 11 contact a mental health specialist, while fewer than 1 in 5 contact general health care providers. Even fewer Hispanic immigrants seek these mental health services. (8)

While Latinos use mental health services less than the general population, rates of mental health service use among Latinos have increased.

Many Hispanics/ Latinos rely on their extended family, community, traditional healers, and/or churches for help during a mental health crisis.

Estimates of the use of alternative and complementary therapies by Hispanic Americans have ranged from 7 to 44%. (8)

Several studies have found that bilingual patients are evaluated differently when interviewed in English as opposed to Spanish and that Hispanics are more frequently undertreated.

One national study found that only 36% of Hispanics with depression received care, compared to 60% of whites. (10)

Mental Health Service Use: US-born and Foreign-born Latinos

* Including psychologists, counselors, other health professionals, religious/spiritual advisors, self-help groups, Internet support groups

** Including herbal therapy, homeopathy, high-dose vitamins, acupuncture, biofeedback, chiropractic exercise, massage, hypnosis, relaxation or meditation, etc.

Barriers to Care

Key barriers to mental health treatment for Hispanics/Latinos, as for most people:
- economic barriers (cost, lack of insurance)
- lack of awareness about mental health issues and services
- stigma associated with mental illness

Additional access to care issues include:
- lack of education and pervasive poverty
- language barriers
- lack of culturally appropriate services
- Lack of appropriate intervention strategies
- mental health professional shortages

Responses/Strategies

- Increase awareness of mental health and chronic disease connection
- Conduct stigma awareness training with gatekeepers
- Improve provider cultural competence
- Improve language accessibility
- Advocate for policies that promote social justice, equity, and equality
- Comprehensive (including mental health and substance use disorders) affordable health coverage for all
- Focus on prevention, early intervention

Resources and References

Resources

National Council of LaRosa (NCLR)  www.nclr.org
National Hispanic Medical Association  www.nhmamd.org

American Society of Hispanic Psychiatry (ASHP)  www.ashp.us.com
Hispanic Medical Professionals (on Facebook)  www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=201417725110
National Alliance for Hispanic Health (NAHH)  www.hispanichealth.org
National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) www.nami.org
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)  www.LULAC.org

References