



RESEARCH • PRACTICE • POLICY

LATINO CENTER FOR HEALTH

ENGAGING LATINO COMMUNITIES



Latinos in Washington State

For decades, Latinos have comprised the fastest-growing racial/ethnic group in the United States. This is also true for Washington state, where Latinos currently account for 12.7% of the total population. In Washington, 32% of Latinos are immigrants, predominantly from the countries of Mexico, Puerto Rico, Cuba, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic. The median age of the state's Latino population is 24 years, much younger than the median age of 42 among non-Hispanic whites in Washington. Many Latinos experience low socio-economic status, with about 28% of Washington's Latino population overall and 24% of Latino children living in poverty. The rate of homeownership among Latinos is 42% (compared to 66% in non-Hispanic whites) and Latinos have a median annual income of \$22,000 (compared to \$36,000 among non-Hispanic whites).

The Latino population in the Washington state is diverse in terms of patterns of immigration and settlement. In Central and Eastern Washington there is long history of migrant farmworkers traveling to the region to seek employment in the agricultural industry. Latinos have lived in these regions for several decades, many settling to raise families, which has resulted in large populations of second and third generation Latinos. Some counties have Latino majorities, such as Adams County (63% Latino) and Franklin County (53% Latino), while Yakima County (49% Latino), and Grant County (42% Latino) have sizeable percentages who are Latino. In Western Washington, most Latinos have arrived more recently resulting in a large first generation population. These immigrants face barriers related to the lack of culturally appropriate services available in Spanish, but may still have more geographical access to services because they are living in urban areas. There are also counties with large rural Latino populations in Western Washington, such as Skagit County where there is a history of migrant farmwork.

Many social factors influence the health of Latinos and their access to health services. Latinos experience immigration-related stressors, language barriers due to limited English proficiency, discrimination, economic instability, and lack of health insurance coverage. As a result, Latinos experience disparities in obesity, diabetes, cancer, mental health and other conditions. For instance, only 69% of Latinos in Washington state report being in very good or excellent health compared to 87% of Whites. Latinos are more likely to be overweight or obese and experience a higher prevalence of diabetes than Whites in Washington state (14% compared to 7% among non-Hispanic Whites). They are also significantly less likely to have a regular source of care. For example, 1 in 4 Latinos lacked health insurance coverage in King County in 2016. Washington state also has a lack of bilingual, bicultural health professionals equipped to provide quality linguistically-competent and culturally-responsive health care. This care gap is more pronounced in rural communities across the state.

History of the Latino Center for Health

In response to the growing and persistent demand for solutions to address health disparities within the Latino community, the Latino Center for Health was formed in 2014. We are the only research center in Washington State and the larger WWAMI region (Washington, Wyoming, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho) with a singular focus on the health of Latinos. We prioritize community-engagement in all aspects of the center's work. As such, we strive to create, support, and facilitate

equitable and mutually beneficial community partnerships aimed at improving health outcomes for Latinos across the state. The state legislature signaled the importance of the center's mission and presence by investing \$1,000,000 over four years to build capacity to support efforts of promoting the health of urban and rural Latinos across the state. In addition, we have external funding for research projects from the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

An initial kickoff conference of over 100 participants from Washington, Alaska, Montana, and Idaho served as a forum to identify community priorities to direct center efforts. These early conversations and collaborations with community members throughout the state helped distill the following priorities of the center:

1. To conduct impactful, innovative and rigorous interdisciplinary community-centered research, leveraging the resources of the University of Washington, to address Latino health;
2. To prepare the next generation of academic and community health leaders to respond to the needs of Latino communities; and
3. To advance sustainable culturally and linguistically responsive health programs and policies to improve the well-being of Latino communities.

The [Latino Center for Health](#) is housed within the [Department of Health Services](#), in the School of Public Health at the University of Washington. The center is supported by two Co-Directors (Gino Aisenberg, PhD and Leo Morales, MD, MPH), a Research Director (India Ornelas, PhD, MPH), a Research Coordinator (Daron Ryan, MPH), a Strategic Planning Advisor (Antoinette Angulo, MPH), and a Graduate Student Assistant (Natasha Ludwig-Barron, MPH). In addition to these six staff members, the center boasts a broad network of over 60 faculty affiliates across the three campuses of the University of Washington. We also have an active community advisory board of eleven local and national leaders representing community, political, and academic sectors.

Community Engagement Strategies

Listening to Community Partners

We have employed three main strategies to ensure that the Center's priorities and activities are aligned with community interests:

1. Convening and meeting with local community leaders
2. Establishing and engaging a Community Advisory Board
3. Hosting strategic forums throughout Washington state

The Latino Center for Health aims to promote the health and well-being of Latinos in Washington state through community-engaged research, training health professionals to work in Latino communities and promoting effective programs and policies to achieve health equity.

To help identify community needs and priorities for addressing health disparities among Latinos in Washington, we engaged the leadership of six leading Latino serving organizations across the state of Washington: [SeaMar Community Health Centers](#), [Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic](#), [Casa Latina](#), [Entre Hermanos](#), [El Centro de la Raza](#) and [Consejo Counseling and Referral Services](#). The purpose of these quarterly meetings was to identify salient concerns of these community leaders that the Latino Center for Health could help to address. For example, the health of the aging Latino population was identified as a concern at one of these meetings and became an important focal point for the Yakima Valley Strategic Forum to which we invited experts in aging in Latino families to present and share their expertise. In another meeting, clinic leaders noted the difficulties of working with the state on workers compensation claims among Latino clients. This led to a contract with the Department of Labor and Industries to collaborate on research to identify the best ways to serve Latino populations with work-related injuries.

Our [community advisory board](#) also helps identify and prioritize ways that we can be responsive to our community. This group meets quarterly and held a half-day planning retreat with the center’s staff in 2017. The board helps ensure that we are accountable to the state and community stakeholders by providing input on our yearly work plan. Board members also serve as ambassadors of our work, promoting the visibility of research and programming to audiences beyond the University. The board now includes three work groups based on our mission: research, strategic partnerships, and advocacy and education.

In order to make sure we heard from stakeholders across the state, we held four strategic forums. The purpose of these forums was to convene elected officials, government representatives, staff from community-based organizations, and researchers around priority topics in different parts of the state. These forums aimed to identify strengths and gaps in serving Latino communities and highlight ways the Latino Center for Health could support their work. The forums also provided an opportunity for community members to learn about the resources of the center, so that they could reach out to us as needs arose. The forums helped connect the resources of the University with the needs of the community to inform practice and policy.



**Latino Center for Health
Strategic Forums 2015-2016**

Site	Date	Topic	Attendees
Vancouver	11/2015	Mental Health	80
<i>Prioritized steps to improve mental health and improving access, utilization, and delivery of culturally appropriate mental health services</i>			
Mt. Vernon	04/2016	Indigenous Health	90
<i>Covered unique needs of indigenous Latino populations in terms of language and culture, environmental health and farmworkers’ rights</i>			
Toppenish/ Yakima Valley	05/2016	Aging & Health Disparities among Rural Latinos	50
<i>Focused on caregiver support interventions, diabetes, healthy aging, and cancer</i>			
Tacoma	11/2016	Adolescent Health	50
<i>Covered community engagement with youth, sexual health, behavioral health, and juvenile justice</i>			

Leveraging UW, State and Federal Resources

Our position within the University comes with many privileges, and with those privileges comes a responsibility to serve our community. The Latino Center for Health has actively sought to engage faculty, staff and students across all three campuses (Seattle, Tacoma and Bothell). We have also developed relationships across the six schools of health sciences (Public Health, Social Work, Dentistry, Social Work, Nursing, Medicine and Pharmacy) and with other local health institutions, such as Seattle Children’s Hospital and the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center. We seek opportunities to leverage these resources on behalf of the community.

The most visible example of this is our Small Grants Program. We provide grants for pilot research projects (\$20,000) and academic-community partner development (\$5000). The program requires UW faculty to actively engage community partners in applying for the funds. We encourage equitable partnerships by requiring the projects to be co-led and allowing funds to go directly to community partners. All grant proposals are reviewed by both researchers and community representatives in our selection process. Many of our small grants have also supported junior faculty early in their careers to help shape the trajectory of their research program and encourage long-term collaborations. Funded projects are also required to present at our faculty affiliate meetings so that their lessons are shared with other researchers on campus.

Latino Center for Health Small Grants Program 2016 & 2017 Award Recipients

UW Medicine & Valley Medical Center

Compañeros en Salud: Adapting and Pilot Testing Culturally-Tailored Diabetes Self-Management Program for Urban Latinos

UW Dept. of Communications & Washington State Coalition for Language Access

Evaluating the Use of Technology in Language Assistance Programs Serving Latino and Other LEP Communities in Washington State

UW Medicine & SeaMar Community Health Centers

Developing Support Materials for Provider-Initiated Conversations About Concussion Safety with Limited English Proficient Hispanic Families

UW School of Dentistry & Casa Latina

The Urban Oral Health Promotores Project

Seattle Children’s Hospital & Yakima Children’s Village

Identifying Barriers to Transition of Care for Rural Latino Children in Yakima with Special Healthcare Needs

UW Health Services & SeaMar Community Health Centers

Understanding Barriers of Indigenous MSFW Accessing Prenatal Care in Skagit and Whatcom Counties

UW Psychiatry & Florida Health Networks

Addressing Depression in Latino Elders: Evaluating the Implementation of the Program to Encourage Active, Rewarding Lives (PEARLS)

UW Center for Creative Conservation & Vive Northwest

Towards a Better Understanding of the Health Benefits of Connecting Latino Children and their Families to Nature

UW Health Communication Research Center & El Centro de la Raza

The State of Latinos in South King County: Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR)



Another example of how we are leveraging University resources is by hosting events at the UW with broad appeal. We intentionally plan speakers and film screenings to serve both community and academic audiences. We advertise these events broadly and invite local media to increase visibility and accessibility. We share our expertise by accepting invitations to speak at community events, such as the Hispanic Roundtable symposium in Olympia and the Washington State Public Health Association meeting in Wenatchee. We also sponsor community events and

meetings that are led and planned by community partners, such as SeaMar’s Latino Health Forum, the newly formed Latinx Health Board in King County and the Promotores Training in Naches.

Our faculty affiliates have also received external funding for community-engaged research projects. These [research projects](#) help build capacity in our local Latino communities and provide access to programs and services they might not otherwise receive. As an example, Dr. Ornelas’ NIH funded study evaluates the Amigas Latinas Motivando el Alma program to reduce depression and anxiety in Latina immigrant women; and Dr. Aisenberg’s NIH funded study is expanding access to depression care among rural Latinos in the Yakima Valley.

Preparing the Next Generation of Academic and Community Leaders

We know that in order to undo the systemic disadvantages that lead to health disparities in the Latino community, we must train the next generation of Latino scholars and leaders. We provide ongoing mentorship and support to Latino faculty, staff and students at UW. Through our faculty affiliate program, we convene faculty across campus with interests in Latino health each quarter to discuss works in progress and share information. We help promote funding and professional development opportunities, as well as link faculty with community partners and students. Our faculty affiliates mentor students with interests in Latino health for class assignments, theses, and capstone projects. Each year we hold a [Latino Faculty Recognition Ceremony](#), where we highlight the scholarly contributions from Latino faculty across all three campuses and help build a sense of community. This event helps address systemic inequality in academia by providing a forum for faculty, staff, students and their families to celebrate their achievements. We also provide several professional development opportunities for staff and students, including formal courses, workshops, and events that focus on Latino health and authentic community engagement.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Over the past four years, we have faced several challenges. We describe these below as well as lessons we have learned as a result.

1. The historical perception of research and the University of Washington within the Latino community. While we may be committed to authentic community engagement, some of those that have come before were not. As we work to build trusting relationships with community partners, we have also needed to address and overcome mistrust or repair broken relationships from the past.

Lesson learned: By listening to the community, we have identified potential pitfalls and worked to address them to establish authentic and impactful partnerships. Our community advisory board and ongoing relationships with community help ensure accountability to our mission.

2. Through our efforts to engage community, we have identified many needs and priorities. We also realize that we cannot address them all and need to be realistic about what we can provide.

Lesson learned: As a new center, we have limited capacity and need to be transparent with community partners about what we can and cannot provide in order to maintain trusting relationships.

UW Latino Center for Health Student Activities & Opportunities

- **Latino Health Professions Career Fair** - May 2017
- **Student Travel Awards** – Ongoing
- **Summer Health Professions Education Program** for undergraduates – 2017 & 2018
- **Health Disparities Course** in School of Public Health
- **Latino Health Pathway and Course** in School of Medicine
- **LCH Student Listserv** to share news and events



3. We have been surprised to find out how many organizations and individuals are already working to address Latino health disparities in our state. While there are many contributing to this effort, it is often underfunded and lacks clear coordination. Also, many organizations lack the infrastructure to engage in grant writing and research activities.

Lesson learned: We can serve an important role as a convener and help build synergy by connecting organizations doing similar work in different sectors. As a trusted institution, we can help facilitate collaborative partnerships and provide research expertise to support their mission and activities. Still, there is a need for more resources to coordinate efforts, especially across our urban and rural contexts in Washington state.

4. There are institutional barriers within the University that limit the scope of our work. We have reached out several Schools on campus, but not always received a firm commitment of support for our work. There are limited mechanisms for funding community-engaged research, and this type of research does not always result in the products typically used to measure faculty success within the University.

Lesson learned: We must continue to demonstrate the importance and impact of the Latino Center for Health, articulate our value to the UW and state legislature, and create high quality products that benefit both academic and community stakeholders.

Our Hopes for the Future

Despite these challenges, we remain hopeful about achieving health equity in Latino communities. Our work has highlighted several areas that merit more research and attention. Our hope is that through continued community engagement, our center can help provide answers and solutions.

1. Latinos in our state live in several unique contexts. There is need to further understand how social, environmental and political differences in communities shape patterns of health. For example: differences between urban and rural settings, or depending on the distribution of Latinos in the community.
2. There is need to focus on particularly vulnerable populations, such as undocumented immigrants. Very little is known about the health effects of detention, immigrant enforcement, discrimination based on legal status, and deportation. Yet, Latinos report the profound impact these events have on their lives and well-being and the lives of others in their communities.
3. Our youth are our future, and one of the fastest growing segments of our population. Given the importance of early childhood on health later in life, it is critical to promote programs and policies that focus on Latino youth and creating healthy environments for their development and success
4. What happens to this relatively healthy and young population as it begins to age? How can programs and policies maintain the protective factors that contribute to the Latino health advantage we observe earlier in their lives? More attention is needed on the health of aging Latino populations and those that care for them.