



## **Latino Health Council COVID 19 Latinx Community Response Plan**

Latinx are the fastest growing minority in the United States. Significant health disparities continue to affect the Latinx community. As the threat of the COVID 19 virus arrived in the United States, it was evident that the Latinx Community was at a greater risk. Recognizing this, several grassroots Latinx community organizations in Dane County came together immediately to start addressing the various anticipated community needs under the umbrella of the Latino Consortium for Action (LCA.) The Latinx Community Response Plan started 3/26/20. As we anticipated, to date Latinx have been very disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and represent the highest percentage of cases locally and statewide. There are many possible reasons for this. Previous disparities are still present. Latinx are overrepresented in essential jobs like medical facilities, janitorial jobs, hospitality industry, food and agricultural industries, factories, etc. These are jobs that are not possible to do from home. Also, Latinx have a higher level of poverty and many cannot take advantage of the usual social safety nets, forcing them to have to continue working, even if sick or infected with the virus. In addition, the current system, with some exceptions, has not provided us with culturally and linguistically relevant support for education, testing, surveillance and follow up.

### **ACTIVITIES**

Most of the activities described below have been created by the Latino Health Council (LHC) leadership and conducted with collaboration of several organizations represented in the Latino Consortium for Action.

- **Latinx Consortium for Action (LCA) Relief Fund**

Considering the financial impact that the COVID 19 pandemic has had for the Latinx community, particularly for our undocumented members, a fund was established and fundraising activities by several of the members started. Immediately the group started meeting weekly and rapidly set up the basis to continue fundraising, how funds will be distributed, participants qualifications, etc. To date the group has been able to secure about \$700,000 and has been able to distribute this among over 1500 individuals and Latinx owned small business.

- **COVID-19 Education Campaign**

- ❖ **Radio programs, Facebook live and various community groups presentations**

Language/cultural relevant education, information updates and community resources have been shared with members of the Latinx Community in an interactive format. To date we have offered over 20 different presentations to an estimated audience of 20,000 individuals.

## ❖ **Social Media: Latino Health Council Facebook page and YouTube**

Recognizing the impact of social media, the decision was quickly made to start selecting and/or producing accurate, culturally and linguistically relevant COVID-19 education materials and to share it on our Facebook/YouTube page. Widespread promotion of this resource was done and our page reported a rapid growth of members following. To date we have placed over 100 education materials, including locally produced COVID-19 health and mental health advice videos.

## ❖ **Multimedia Youth education campaign**

As the pandemic continued evolving, we identified a big gap reaching a large segment of our community: the youth. Realizing that messaging and promotion of the messaging needed to be different we recruited a group of Latinx college pre-med students and medical students to assist us in producing appropriate messaging and to help us promote in the age appropriate platforms like Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat, and others.

## • **Mental Health Support**

Just as the financial and potentially life-threatening impact of Covid-19 was recognized in our community, mental health issues were one of the first consequences we identified. Our community already was facing great inequities for many areas, but particularly worse in the provision of mental health. We knew that any help needed to come within the community with our own resources. We put in place two main strategies:

**-General strategy:** Motivational/educational videos, locally produced for local needs and from local, well-known and respected, mental health experts with messaging that is language, culturally, and situational relevant. An average of two videos per week have been produced since the intervention started.

**-Individual strategy:** This intervention aims to provide brief emotional and social support, education and assessment for Spanish speaking individuals that may be at risk of mental health complications due to Covid -19 and provide appropriate referrals as necessary. A very strict and step-by-step protocol was put in place for this project. The intervention is organized by members of the LHC, referrals are received by partner Latinx community organizations and the emotional support sessions are conducted by qualified volunteer community members.

One of the utmost risk groups for mental health issues we recognized was the elderly, since they needed to be protected the most by staying home isolated as much as possible as they were also the group at greatest risk for getting COVID and getting sicker. We designed a very specific intervention for this group with peer to peer support.

Additionally, after some time of implementing these activities, we realized we also needed to take care of the service providers, including ourselves to address secondary trauma. We started offering similar brief interventions to the service providers

individually and in a group format for members of their organizations through virtual sessions.

To date we have partnered with five of the most well-known Latinx community organizations, have 15 qualified volunteers providing the intervention, and have served over 400 individuals on an average of two encounters per individual. So far over 500 hours have been invested in this activity.

- **Community Testing Advocacy**

It is well known that easy and appropriate access to testing is crucial to identifying individuals infected with COVID-19 early and to be able to recommend isolation to protect others as well as to provide the information needed to do contact tracing. However, testing alone is not enough. Testing needs to be provided with the appropriate infrastructure conducive to proper follow up, in settings accessible and trusted by the communities, conducted by language and culturally appropriate personnel and offering information/referral to other necessary resources.

In order to achieve the above goals, we have been working closely with the Public Health Madison Dane County, advocating and serving as subject matter experts, providing a very detailed plan to establish a long-term testing site for the Latinx Community in Madison and other at-risk rural areas in Dane County.

- **Safe Business/Organizations Campaign**

As businesses could start reopening, we identified another gap: educating the Latinx business owners as well as their employees and their clients about the importance of observing the recommended COVID-19 prevention measures, particularly the importance of wearing a mask.

Partnering with the Latino Children and Family Council and the Latino Chamber of Commerce we developed a strategy to recruit businesses willing to follow the recommended preventive measures and assist with promoting them. We provide them with free educational posters to openly display at their business entrance in both Spanish and English, free masks/facial coverings, and educational handouts for their employees and clients. In addition, we are developing a list of “safe businesses” and promoting them throughout the Latinx community but also with the community at large. We are also producing testimonial videos with the business owners and their clients and creating radio commercials with information about the importance of wearing a mask and to follow the other recommended preventive measures. After only a week of starting this project we already have 15 participating businesses and have given out 1000 masks.

Furthermore, next week we are planning to start distributing education materials and masks to organizations providing assistance to the Latinx community and to other places where Latinx gather like churches and parks.