

Raising Latino Children in Wisconsin

Understanding Community Needs from an
Intergenerational, Bilingual, Multicultural and
Community-Led Approach



PROJECT REPORT

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Executive Summary

Latinos form the second-largest racial/ethnic group within the United States and in Wisconsin, after non-Hispanic Whites according to the 2020 Census. At the same time, this growing population continues to experience some of the worst social, economic and health inequities in the state.

Despite ongoing efforts and successes from public health authorities and organizations to understand and address the biggest issues impacting Latinos and other underserved and underrepresented communities, health disparities continue to widen in these populations.

It seems clear that new ways of engaging and partnering with communities are vital; ways that create structures and approaches in which those who suffer inequalities can be directly included and lead the transformation of their communities as they bring the lived experience, knowledge and wisdom that is required.

In an intent to respond to more inclusive and community-driven approaches, in 2020, the UW-Madison's School of Human Ecology, Department of Human Development and Family Studies, and healthTIDE identified and began piloting the concept of community-led conversations as a potential means for engaging with parents and caregivers who are most impacted by health disparities.

In 2021, the first set of community conversations was conducted with the Black Community in Milwaukee and Madison, Wisconsin in partnership with the African American Breastfeeding Network. At the end of 2021, planning started to conduct community conversations with Indigenous Tribal Nations in Wisconsin in partnership with the Great Lakes Intertribal Council.

Later in 2022, there was the opportunity to continue this work in the Latino community and to move a step further on the spectrum of community engagement by partnering not only with Latino-serving organizations but also increasing community power and leadership by working with grassroots Latina leaders who would be at the forefront and center of all the work.



Building on previous local, state and national efforts, **the Latino Community Conversations provide clear data on the most pressing needs of Latino parents and caregivers of young children in Wisconsin to lead healthier lives, as well as the concrete solutions and requests they are making to organizations and institutions to address those needs.**

Equally important, this study proposes **a new approach to data collection that fosters civic power and community leadership, provides meaningful community inclusion throughout the process, and places culture at the center of the data analysis.**

Following these overarching goals, this summary and report includes the results of five community conversations with Latino parents and caregivers in Milwaukee, Madison, Green Bay and Racine, all led by grassroots Latina leaders who participated in the process from planning to dissemination.

Importantly, this project has taken many steps in terms of methodology and process to focus on people's stories, culture, narrative, and leadership. As a result, the report has intentionally included a large number of quotes, along with extensive cultural considerations, which can help the reader understand the complexity of the Latino experience.



Below is the summary of the Key Findings from these conversations, which includes the Challenges and Solutions for Latino families to live healthier lives.

Report Conclusions

- Latino parents and caregivers throughout Wisconsin, in urban and more rural areas, those who immigrated to the U.S., as well as those who were born in this country, all face a similar set of challenges in trying to keep their young children healthy.
- Any attempt to transform a community should be led by and informed by the wisdom, knowledge and experience of those who live in and are part of that community.
- It is critically important to integrate Culture into qualitative data analysis.
- True community engagement takes time, funding and requires flexibility.
- Beyond data gathering, Community Conversations can be an important way to foster community connection and support mental health.

We hope that this depth of information, shared and entrusted by parents and caretakers, can be used by organizations and institutions to develop policies, improve programs and align resources that can impact the environmental conditions of Latino families in Wisconsin.

We also hope the community-driven approach followed in this project can be replicated and improved in the future to bring transformative change to the way we engage, understand, and support communities; honoring their journey with empathy and recognizing their wisdom and resilience.

Our deepest gratitude goes to all the participants for these conversations, our community leaders, all the students who participated in our study team, and the community organizations and funders that made this project possible.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS FOR LATINO FAMILIES TO LIVE HEALTHY LIVES

Healthy Foods

- Price of healthy foods
- Lack of time & energy to cook
- Children's picky eating
- Food industry advertising
- Competition between homemade food and fast/restaurant food
- Poor quality school food
- Parenting styles and role modeling



Physical Activity

- Winter; fear of exposure to cold
- Car-centric culture reduces mobility
- Lack of time & energy to exercise
- Children get unmotivated
- Limited space in programs
- Lack of safe, green spaces in Latino neighborhoods
- Children's addiction to technology
- Racism and discrimination



Mental Health

Causes of stress, anxiety & sadness:

- Lack of community/support system
- Intense work culture of USA
- Separation from family
- For stay-at-home mothers: routine, feeling trapped, and loneliness
- Cultural stigma
- Lack of resources to self-care
- Historical, collective and individual trauma



Access to Resources

- Too few centers/programs to serve whole community
 - Many fill up immediately
 - Some are far away
 - Emergency appointments not available
- No child care assistance
- Lack of community awareness about existing resources



“Neither I nor my husband grew up here so when it's winter, the truth is that we don't take our children out for anything, we don't know where to go, we don't have the culture of activities in that climate. It's extremely difficult for us.”





“In the school, there was a time where the teachers were racist with my children; the teacher would tell my son and daughter that they were going to send immigration to get us. Other children would shout at my daughter, saying that she didn't have papers, that she was going to be deported. My children are traumatized and were so frightened to even go to school.”

Racism & Discrimination

Negative experiences with some staff from institutions:


- School teachers mistreat Latino children
- Police pull people over for “looking suspicious”
- Hospitals asked for Social Security # to take Covid test
- DMV denies driver's license to US-born Latino if parents are undocumented



Impact of COVID-19

Negative impacts included:

- Increased depression and stress
- For some, a loss of spirituality; for others, an increase in spirituality
- Loss of community and support
- Many lost their jobs
- Physical separation from others
- Exacerbated societal issues (ex. youth decreased respect for elders)




Importance of Voting

US-born Latino participants expressed:

- strong support for active voting
- that US-born Latinos have a greater responsibility to represent their community

However, community barriers include:

- Lack of knowledge/education about the governmental system
- Mistrust of the system
- Low value of voting
- Few informative Spanish-language channels



Belonging

- Lack of legal documentation
- Language barriers
- Discrimination and racism



“Those who are second generation or third generation, your vote makes a difference. So you need to get out and vote because what is settled up in Congress. It's going to impact your quality of life. It's going to impact your health. It's going to impact your family.”



COMMUNITY NEEDS, SOLUTIONS, & REQUESTS



Healthy Eating

- 1** Public schools need to increase access to healthy and fresh food options and decrease the prevalence of meals that resemble fast food (such as pizza, burgers, etc.) as those play a role in negatively shaping children's food preferences.
- 2** Develop classes for parents that teach healthy & culturally relevant cooking and meal planning on a budget so that they can offer more healthy food options at home, as well as model healthy eating behaviors with their children.
- 3** Offer parenting classes to expand parents' skills, ideas, and strategies to create positive structure and discipline at home when it comes to healthy eating and physical activity.
- 4** Local governments can offer incentives for restaurants/food trucks to increase the availability of healthier food options for families who eat out.



- 1** Develop and disseminate free and low-cost physical activity programs and recreational activities for children and adults that promote movement and family connection.
 - a** Additional programs during the winter time or after school, such as walking clubs, dancing, swimming, and soccer.
 - b** Ensure that programs for parents include childcare options and/or age-suited activities for children.
 - c** Ensure that programs and staff are culturally and linguistically responsive so that Latino families feel welcome.
 - d** Identify neighborhood locations that offer easy and close access for Latinos.
- 2** Policies that ensure safer streets in Latino and low-income neighborhoods to promote safe and relaxed walking for individuals and families.
- 3** Parents need to continue to try to find options to increase physical activity and decrease screen time for them and their children.

Physical Activity

Mental Health & Belonging

- 1** Create and sponsor community groups that offer peer-to-peer support for women (and men) which are facilitated by people who belong to the same community.
 - a** Create programs for immigrant women that allow them to have open conversations, and connect with their past and each other through storytelling.
 - b** Create support groups where Latinos (particularly women) can share their stories of trauma (and joy) to find healing and a sense of belonging with each other.
- 2** Healthcare organizations need to emphasize linguistic and culturally responsive mental health services and hire bilingual Latino staff to connect more directly with Latino immigrants and earn their trust.
- 3** Organizations that serve Latino families can open more dialogue and awareness among Latinos (adults, youth, and children) about the importance of mental health, self-regulation, trauma, and the need to change the stigma around it.
- 4** Mindfulness activities, spiritual activities, and retreats (organized by the church or other organizations) that offer child care or take place while children are in school.
- 5** Parents and immigrant advocacy organizations need to contact local authorities to investigate and stop discrimination based on immigration status.



- 1** Increase and expand the number of programs that support the variety of health-related needs for the Latino community in ways that are culturally and linguistically appropriate.
- 2** Ensure better promotion and advertisement of existing and new programs/activities.

Community Resources



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