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Los Angeles County is not fully supporting its Latino residents, report says

UCLA faculty contributed to the Alliance for a Better Community's Latino Scorecard

Jessica Wolf | August 4, 2021

To help ensure that Los Angeles County's Latino population can thrive, local and state officials must find new and more creative ways to invest in policies that specifically target structural racism, and support robust funding and collective community action in K–12 schools, according to a recently published report.

UCLA faculty, working with researchers from the University of Southern California and Loyola Marymount University, compiled and analyzed data for the [Latino/a Scorecard Report: A Policy Roadmap for Transforming Los Angeles](#), which was published July 28 by the Alliance for a Better Community, or ABC.

"Latinos and others in Los Angeles deserve a fair and just opportunity to be as healthy as possible," said Michael Rodriguez, professor of family medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. "We need to strengthen our government leadership's commitment to partner with organizations such as ABC to promote policies that will support the transformation of community conditions and institutional and governmental systems to promote health equity."

Though Los Angeles is home to one of the largest Latino populations in the country — nearly half of the county's residents are Latino, according to latest census data, and that number is growing — the report showed that the county remains a difficult place for Latinos to thrive.

And that's something policymakers must consider as they apply recovery resources and seek to rebuild from the devastation of the pandemic, according to the report, which examined five factors: education, health, public safety, economic prosperity (including housing) and civic engagement.

Rodriguez, who also is a professor at the UCLA Fielding School of Public Health, contributed to the report's health analytics. Health for Latinos in Los Angeles County rated a "D" grade overall, with "D" scores in almost every health category, including access to health care/insurance and mental health services, COVID-19 vaccination rates, depression, suicidal ideation and childhood obesity.

The report also addresses how the struggles of Latino communities were exacerbated by the structural inequities that existed prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 and which have intensified because of the pandemic.

"There is a crisis when we look at drops in life expectancy, high teen pregnancy, rates of diabetes and lack of health care, among other health problems," Rodriguez said. "It will require us to work together to develop and implement an action agenda to achieve health equity."

The report's policy suggestions for improving health conditions in Latino communities include large-scale thinking like officially declaring racism a public health crisis and expanding access to "one-stop-shop" programs like the state's innovative CalAIM system, which is part of the department of health care services' Medi-Cal reform.

Researchers also recommend creating community health care and health services hubs around K–12 schools and re-thinking urban landscapes to create more parks in Latino communities. Long-term investment in programs that improve the cultural and Spanish-language competency of current care providers and educational interventions that inspire more Latinos to get into the medical profession would also have a powerful impact.

Veronica Terriquez, incoming director of the UCLA Chicano Studies Research Center, wrote the conclusion for the report. She drew attention specifically to conditions for children and young people.

“The negative effects of the pandemic on the region may be felt for decades given its devastating implications for young people’s education and well-being,” said Terriquez, who is a professor in the departments of urban planning and Chicana and Chicano and Central American studies. “Offering a close examination of how L.A. County’s institutions are supporting the health, education, public safety, economic prosperity and civic engagement of the county’s Latino residents, this scorecard points to a much-needed call to action that can help build a more equitable and inclusive region for all.”

Nearly 75% of students in the Los Angeles Unified School District are Latino. The report, using mostly data from before the pandemic, gave the county overall a C grade, with some progress in areas like high school graduation rates (B) and English proficiency for by fifth grade for English learners (A). But scores for higher education enrollment for Latinos was only a D. Reading proficiency by third grade also rated a D.

Recommendations to improve educational opportunities for Latinos range from investing in early childhood programs and early-grade dual-language programs and building a stronger pipeline for Latino teachers. The report also highlights the need to create, promote and invest in educational offerings like trade schools and certification programs.

For Latino students in higher education, many of whom are first-generation college students, programs that shepherd them through the institution with culturally relevant sources of guidance and tutoring/mentoring services are critical. The report cited UCLA’s long-running [Academic Advancement Program](#) as an example of such a program.

The report also challenges policymakers to enact sweeping changes that will have a positive impact on the economic prosperity of Latino communities, including expanding the state’s economic safety net for low-income workers, creating programs that offer equitable child care services, developing partnerships with business and community groups for workforce training in high-growth industries, increasing support to Latino small businesses and micro-businesses like street vendors, forgiving student debt, and increasing access to programs that prepare Latino families for home ownership.

The scorecard was produced in collaboration with members of the three universities and 37 community groups. It is the first such report from Alliance for a Better Community since 2003.

“This community’s resilience and hard work is undeniable, and for some, there has been significant progress,” said Vanessa Aramayo, executive director of the Alliance for a Better Community. “However, for a majority, systemic barriers continue to persist. As we turn towards recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, it is critical for us to remove these barriers, protect the progress that has been made and ensure any recovery is fully shared by everyone.”