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We Are California Calls on LA County to Address Health and Economic Inequality



The California Community Foundation

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Bold Actions Recommended to Address Pandemic's Disproportionate Impact On Latinos

Los Angeles, Aug. 05, 2020 (GLOBE NEWSWIRE) -- Calling attention to the COVID-19 pandemic's disproportionate impact on Latinos, *We Are California / Somos California* called upon County of Los Angeles leaders to do more to address the dual injustices of health and economic inequality left in the virus' wake.

Latinos constitute 48.7% of Los Angeles County's population, but account for 68% of reported COVID cases. The age-adjusted death rate of Latinos is 51 out of every 100,000 persons -- over twice that of the County's white population (22/100,000). More striking still is that 72% of COVID fatalities for those under 65 years of age are Latino.

"We know there are many reasons for these horrific COVID disparities. Like African Americans, Latinos are more likely than other groups to have jobs that do not allow them to work remotely or practice physical distancing," said Antonia Hernández, president and CEO of the California Community Foundation. "Unequal treatment in communities and by care providers, bias, fear, the highest rates of uninsurance—all of these are factors."

The group is requesting County leaders to make the following efforts to reduce cases and deaths among Latinos and, more broadly, Angelenos.

- Ensure collection, analysis and public availability of occupation data from COVID-19 Confidential Morbidity Reports (CMRs) to focus enforcement activity. Ensuring the completion of these reports, including the "Occupation or Job Title" field, will provide critical data that must then inform County efforts to focus limited enforcement resources of public health orders on workplaces of essential workers whose industries are seeing workers with the largest numbers of COVID infections.
- Dramatically expand free COVID virus and antibody testing in community settings with fast turnaround times for results, prioritizing communities with highest infection and mortality rates. These services must be staffed by individuals who are bilingual and experienced at working with Latino communities.

- Increase access to quarantine and isolation facilities for COVID-diagnosed individuals living in crowded housing to effectively contain community spread, providing wage-replacement guarantees for quarantined persons.
- Expand culturally-competent outreach and education efforts in communities with the highest infection and mortality rates through government grants to nonprofit agencies that use proven strategies of trusted community health outreach like health “promotoras.” Education efforts should include information on COVID transmission, prevention, roles of testing and contact tracing and resources to report businesses willfully endangering employees or the public through failure to follow health orders.
- Implement a COVID-19 “grading system” for businesses like the ones the Department of Public Health currently applies to restaurants but based on conformance with applicable government COVID orders and business safety checklists. All employers who require employees to interact with other employees or the public in a manner that does not permit effective physical distancing would be required to obtain a passing grade. Grades shall be posted in the workplace and available to the public with failing grades requiring business closure until such a time as unsafe conditions have been remedied.
- Provide and publicize a 211, 800 or toll-free number for reporting employers who fail to provide employees with appropriate personal protective equipment (“PPE”) or who fail to follow applicable government COVID orders.
- Provide crisis counseling telephone line with language translation capabilities to support individuals experiencing additional stress during this time due to unemployment, illness or both.

“While we are aware that this pandemic poses unprecedented challenges, we recognize that the health and safety of the region’s majority population is inextricably tied with economic recovery and shared prosperity,” said Kevin de León, Senate President Emeritus & Los Angeles City Councilmember-Elect. “Real and sustained attention towards reducing racial/ethnic COVID-19 disparities can and will make a measurable difference in the health and well-being of our region.”

We Are California / Somos California stands ready to support and assist the City and the County taking bold and needed action to address the shocking and disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Latinx community and on other communities of color.

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We Are California / Somos California (“**Somos California**”) is a group of Latino leaders in Southern California originally formed to coordinate activities commemorating 25 years since the passage of Proposition 187. *Somos California* has since continued its work by focusing on emerging issues affecting California’s Latino communities. They include:

- Antonia Hernández, President and CEO, California Community Foundation

- Sonja Diaz, Founding Director, Latino Policy & Politics Initiative UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs
- John Echeveste, CEO, LA Plaza de Cultura y Artes
- María Elena Durazo, Senator, CA State District 24
- Kevin de León, Senate President Emeritus & Los Angeles City Councilmember-Elect
- Manuel Pastor, Director, USC Equity Research Institute
- Antonio R. Villaraigosa, 41st Mayor of the City of Los Angeles
- Gloria Molina, Retired Los Angeles County Supervisor, First District
- Thomas A. Saenz, President and General Counsel, MALDEF
- Chon Noriega
- Arturo Vargas
- Monica Lozano
- Dr. Fernando Guerra