

The COVID-19 Vaccines and the Latino Community:

Principles for an Equitable Distribution

As we pass the one-year mark of the pandemic, transmission of the novel coronavirus continues at alarmingly high rates. Yet, many are cautiously optimistic. Our nation rapidly exceeded the goal of administering 100 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccines within the Biden administration's first 100 days, and vaccination numbers continue to rise. Still, COVID-19 remains a top concern for Latinos, based on a recent poll conducted by UnidosUS and Univision. The nation's 60 million Latinos,* who make significant contributions to the economy and yet are more likely to be negatively affected by the coronavirus, have seen far lower vaccination rates. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) show that most people who have been vaccinated are White (69%), with Hispanics representing only 9% of those fully vaccinated.† Evidence from the states confirms this all-too-familiar trend. For example, in California only 23% of vaccinations have been administered to Hispanics even though they represent 40% of the total population, 55% of COVID-19 cases, and 47% of all COVID-19 deaths in the state.‡

In line with promises to lead with equity, the Biden administration recently pledged \$10 billion to support outreach efforts and access to COVID-19 vaccines for underserved communities as part of the American Rescue Plan. UnidosUS (formerly the National Council of La Raza) works to improve opportunities for Hispanics in this country and applauds this investment as it will expand desperately needed vaccination sites and support trusted members of our network of nearly 300 Affiliate community-based organizations and other grassroots organizations in rural and urban communities.

* The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. This document may also refer to this population as "Latinx" to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions that are present in the community.

† The data were the latest available as of April 7, 2021, and the CDC states that race and ethnicity information was available for only about 57% of fully vaccinated people.

‡ The data were the latest available as of April 7, 2021, and California officials note that race and ethnicity information was missing for about 6% of individuals receiving a vaccine.

Even with dedicated funding, plans that do not intentionally consider equity will fail to reach Latinos and others who are underserved. Addressing and mitigating racial and ethnic disparities in access to the vaccines is vital to the nation's recovery. We cannot achieve broad population (herd) immunity if vaccines are not available and easily accessible across all communities. Based on our experience and expertise, UnidosUS developed the following principles for equitable distribution of the vaccines:

- 1. *Plan intentionally for the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines.*** Vaccination distribution plans should deliberately target those most in need, including communities of color. Distribution parameters and guidelines should account for existing and emerging racial and ethnic health disparities driving higher rates of COVID-19 and its health effects, including occupation, living conditions, and incidence of certain medical conditions. Failure to distribute available supply in a way that reaches communities most affected by COVID-19 will severely undermine our national health and economic recovery and widen inequity.
- 2. *Make vaccinations as easy as possible to access.*** Many Latinos still face significant barriers to accessing vaccines even as the supply increases and vaccines remain free of charge to recipients. Specifically, many scheduling systems require internet and computer access and some computer literacy to navigate complex websites. Even if a person successfully accesses and navigates a website, available appointment times often conflict with work schedules and may not be geographically convenient. Targeted and innovative approaches that consider these challenges are necessary to ensure that no one is required to have internet access, a car, a flexible job schedule, or other privileges to receive a lifesaving vaccine.
- 3. *Collaborate with community partners to build trust.*** Community-based organizations—such as UnidosUS Affiliates that provide direct services and resources to support the well-being of Latinos—serve as trusted messengers and influencers for the Latino community. The White House commitment to provide additional funding to these groups and critical staff, such as community health workers, acknowledges the essential role they have played and will continue to play in distribution of the vaccines. Their role is particularly important amid continuing concerns about the vaccines in various communities, including mixed-status families and the uninsured. Trusted community organizations must be involved in all levels of vaccination planning, education, and delivery to ensure that communities' specific needs are considered and that workable solutions are implemented.
- 4. *Ensure a culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate response.*** All communities deserve to have the facts regarding the vaccines' safety and efficacy, and information provided through trusted messengers and pathways contributes to informed decision-making. However, the 25 million people throughout the country with limited English proficiency experience barriers to accurate information on COVID-19 as well as to the health care and safety net they need to protect themselves and their families. Culturally relevant information can enhance vaccine uptake among Latinos and move the nation closer to broad immunity and recovery. The UnidosUS-Univision poll on [Latinos and COVID-19](#) reveals that Latinos need information in their preferred language on how to access vaccines.



5. Collect, disseminate, and protect data to track disparities. Available data show clear disparities in COVID-19 cases, deaths, hospitalizations, and vaccination rates. Still, those data sets are incomplete, making it difficult to know the true extent of disparities and to facilitate better decision-making about the health, social, and economic needs of our communities. Vaccine distribution efforts must include intentional efforts to enhance disaggregated data collection, analysis, and reporting by specific demographic categories, including by age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, primary language, disability status, and other demographic factors. These data should be publicly available to support effective use of resources and intended impact or efforts among cities, states, public health departments, health care entities, and COVID-19 testing sites. In addition, it is important that data are collected and stored in a way that protects sensitive information and that it is only used to determine vaccination disparities and target resources appropriately.

About UnidosUS

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an Affiliate Network of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our country stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit www.unidosus.org, or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).