

# A Historic Opportunity to Advance an Equitable and Inclusive Economic Recovery for Latinos

## Legislative Priorities for UnidosUS

As Congress debates the details of budget reconciliation and human infrastructure legislation, UnidosUS is articulating our core legislative priorities. An inclusive approach to human infrastructure in the wake of the pandemic is essential. In the 16 months since the spread of COVID-19 was declared a national emergency on March 13, 2020, more than 624,657 Americans have died of the disease, at least 114,937 of whom were Latino.\*

Racial and ethnic disparities in wealth, housing, and health resulting from the virus created numerous economic challenges for Latinos and the immigrant community. It exacerbated existing disparities among communities of color and highlighted a legacy of structural racism with respect to health care and coverage, wages, and economic supports. The nation's pandemic recovery presents an opportunity to emerge from this crisis equitably, but only if Congress shows decisive leadership on several key priorities for Latinos.

## Our Top Three Priorities Would Be Life-Changing for Latinos

### 1. A path to citizenship for essential workers, DREAMers, TPS-holders, and farmworkers.

**Why this matters for Latinos:** For decades, Congress has failed to update our nation's immigration system, forcing millions of undocumented Latino immigrants to live in fear that they will be separated from their communities and loved ones. Latinos have lived through this fear even as they have stepped up for our country, most recently as part of the disproportionately high number of undocumented essential workers who ensured that our country was fed, healthy, and moving forward during the worst of the pandemic. An estimated 5.2 million undocumented immigrants have worked as essential workers—including 400,000 agricultural workers; 400,000 cleaning staff; 300,000 packers, stockers, and shippers of essential goods; and 100,000 home health and personal care aides. Now it is time for Congress to step up and finally provide a path to citizenship for these immigrants who will continue to be key to our economic recovery and future prosperity.

\* 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.

**Resources:**

- [Washington Post op-ed](#) by UnidosUS President and CEO Janet Murguía and Defending Democracy Together Director and respected conservative commentator Bill Kristol calling on Democrats to protect immigrants on the pandemic's frontlines, even if that means using the budget reconciliation process. As it notes, a pathway to citizenship would have a substantial budgetary impact, shares similarities with previous immigration proposals that have passed the Senate Byrd rule, and is overwhelmingly popular with the American public, including a majority of Republicans.
- [Center for American Progress report](#) showing the positive economic impact from legalizing essential workers, DREAMers, and TPS recipients. The report shows how this pathway would boost U.S. GDP by \$989 billion over 10 years, create over 203,000 new jobs, and boost wages for all Americans by \$300.
- [BSP Research and EquisLabs Poll](#) from battleground states and districts across the country finding that Latino voters care deeply about immigration reform, support President Biden's immigration approach and Democratic immigration policy solutions, and are willing to reward action on the issue. The poll shows that 82% of Latino voters support the "American Dream and Promise Act," 82% support the "Farm Workforce Modernization Act," and 80% support an earned legal status and pathway to citizenship for essential workers.

**2. A permanent, fully refundable extension of the Child Tax Credit expansion from the American Rescue Plan Act, and ensuring that eligibility for the credit is restored for immigrant children.**

**Why this matters for Latinos:** The Biden/Harris administration has an aggressive goal to cut childhood poverty in half. Achieving this goal will require an expansive enrollment of Latino families, as Hispanic children are 26% of all U.S. children but 41% of all children living in poverty. To reduce child poverty equitably, we also must include children in immigrant families who have an Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN). These children, 85% of whom are Hispanic, were cut out of the CTC by the 2017 Trump tax cuts.

**Resources:**

- [UnidosUS fact sheet](#) on the CTC's impact on Latino children and outstanding implementation gaps policymakers must address to equitably reduce child poverty.
- [Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy State-by-State study](#) of including undocumented children in the CTC expansion.

**3. Permanent expansion of affordable, quality health coverage to those in the Medicaid coverage gap.**

**Why this matters for Latinos:** State policymakers' refusal to expand Medicaid—even amid a pandemic—has led the uninsured rate for Latino parents and children to increase more quickly and at a faster pace than in non-expansion states, and created a coverage gap that denies over two million Americans access to affordable health coverage. Latinos have suffered disproportionately from the COVID-19 pandemic and are more than twice as likely to be hospitalized or die from the virus as are non-Hispanic whites. While Latinos are far more likely to be uninsured than whites, more than 600,000 uninsured Latinos living in states that refuse to expand Medicaid have no pathway to affordable, quality health insurance. Overall, nearly 30% of people in the coverage gap are Latino.

**Resources:**

- [UnidosUS/Georgetown University Center for Children and Families report](#) entailing how expanding Medicaid would help close the coverage gap for Latino children and parents.

## Other Important Goals for the Latino Community

- 4. Strengthen nutrition assistance by expanding Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) access to better reach children in high-poverty districts, expanding the Summer Electronic Benefits Program (EBT) program to ensure it reaches all eligible children nationwide, and permitting direct certification for school meals based on Medicaid eligibility data.**

**Why this matters for Latinos:** CEP allows schools in high-poverty areas to provide meals to all low-income students at no cost. More than eight million Latino children attend high-poverty schools in which at least 40% of students are certified to receive free or reduced-price school meals. As we saw throughout the pandemic, children's nutrition needs do not change when schools are closed, including during the summer months. Expanding Summer EBT will ensure that low-income Latino children have consistent access to healthy food. With higher Latino child participation rates in Medicaid than in other programs like SNAP, expanding direct certification to Medicaid will ensure many more eligible food-insecure Latino children are able to access nutritious food.

**Resources:**

- UnidosUS briefs on food insecurity among Hispanic children in [Florida](#) and [Texas](#) that examine the nutrition landscape and helps to identify how policymakers can invest in programs that improve access to nutritious food for all children.

- 5. Ensure Latino higher education success by investing \$62 billion in the College Completion Fund and creating or strengthening articulation agreements for states participating in free community college partnerships.**

**Why this matters for Latinos:** Before the pandemic, Latinos had the largest attainment growth in postsecondary education of any other racial or ethnic group. Between 1990 and 2016, Latino enrollment increased by 337%—a historic growth from 782,400 to 3.4 million students. COVID-19 has now put those gains in jeopardy, causing the first decline in Latino enrollment in over a decade, with fall 2020 seeing a 20% drop. This was higher than the national fall enrollment drop of 13%, and spring 2021 data shows a continuous downward enrollment trend.

However, while Latinos experienced record enrollment numbers pre-pandemic, Latino students experienced a much higher completion gap than their white, Asian, and Black counterparts—2019 marked a 3.2 percentage point drop in their persistence and retention rates. The Latino transfer-out rate also fell by 1.7 percentage points to 6.6%, the lowest transfer-out rate compared to all other racial/ethnic groups in the same cohort. These provisions are vital to ensuring that Latino students can access and complete a postsecondary education.

**Resources:**

- UnidosUS [one-pager](#) on top higher education legislative priorities for reconciliation.