

December 21, 2021

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The Honorable Kathy Hoffman,
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Re: Meeting request regarding equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines for Latino children and families in Arizona

Dear Director Herrington, Chief Goodloe, and Superintendent Hoffman,

On behalf of UnidosUS (formerly the National Council of La Raza), I write to **request a meeting with you to discuss UnidosUS's recent survey findings and recommendations to improve equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for Arizona Latino children and their families.**¹

Unquestionably, the COVID-19 pandemic is impacting every aspect of the well-being of Arizona's children and families. We recognize that Governor Ducey's administration initially encouraged Arizonans to slow the spread of virus through such efforts as the #MaskUpAZ campaign. Yet we

¹ For more than 50 years, UnidosUS, established in Arizona in 1968, has advanced opportunities for middle and working-class Latino children and families to achieve the highest level of health possible. In this capacity, UnidosUS and its Affiliate Network of more than 260 local, community-based organizations in 36 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, including 11 in Arizona, work diligently to ensure that the needs of our community are met. Through our work with these Affiliates, we help ensure that more Americans, including Latinos, have access to affordable, quality health coverage. With funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), UnidosUS Affiliates Mountain Park Health Center (Phoenix), Valle del Sol (Phoenix), and Comite de Bien Estar, Inc. (San Luis) are also conducting vaccine outreach in Arizona Latino communities.

are concerned with the state's inconsistent messaging on vaccines, alongside the politicization of mask usage and vaccination, and a statewide ban on local vaccine mandates are creating a polarized environment around COVID-19 mitigation efforts. Such efforts are critical for the state to recover from the pandemic, especially with a growing threat of another COVID-19 wave with the Omicron variant and its potential impact on our schools and health systems.

The COVID-19 vaccines remain the strongest and most critical protection against COVID-19. While Arizona initially had high demand for the vaccine, the data showed that those doses were overwhelmingly concentrated in white, affluent ZIP codes.² The state piloted a program to reach the low-income ZIP code 85009 in the spring of 2021 that was expanded to the One Community Initiative,³ a program to reach herd immunity through fair and equitable vaccine distribution. Additionally, county leaders and community partners have used mobile units to bring the vaccines to rural and low-income areas, including our own mobile educational tour in Phoenix.

Despite these efforts, Latinos continue to experience systemic barriers to access COVID-19 vaccines that could impede their ability to vaccinate their children.⁴ According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, nearly 4 in 10 (37%) of Arizona Latinos have received a COVID-19 vaccination,⁵ including Latino children. Among people ages 65 and older who have received a booster shot, nearly 3 in 4 (74%) were white compared to less than 1 in 10 (8%) who were Latino.⁶ As of December 15, 2021, 29% of COVID-19 cases and 27% of COVID-19 deaths in Arizona are among those who identify as Hispanic/Latino.⁷

Risks for infection are also increasing for Latino children who are back in school and remain unvaccinated.⁸ At the start of the school year, children between the ages of 10 and 19 experienced the highest COVID-19 transmission rate in Arizona.⁹ Despite the sharp increase in COVID-19 cases among school aged children, Governor Ducey implemented a statewide ban on mask mandates in schools, even going so far as withholding grant monies from schools who

2 Stephanie Innes and Alison Steinbach, "Some wealthy ZIP codes faring better in vaccination rollout, new Maricopa County data shows," *AZCentral.com*, February 16, 2021, <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-health/2021/02/16/some-wealthy-maricopa-county-areas-faring-better-covid-19-vaccine/4460257001/> (accessed September 15, 2021).

3 One Community Initiative, <https://onecommunityaz.com/> (accessed September 15, 2021).

4 Arce, Julissa, "Health care equity is a key part of racial justice," UnidosUS Blog, August 5, 2021, <https://www.unidosus.org/blog/2021/08/05/health-care-equity-racial-justice/>, (accessed February 20, 2021).

5 Ndugga, N. et.al., "Latest Data on COVID-19 Vaccinations by Race/Ethnicity," Kaiser Family Foundation. October 6, 2021, <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/latest-data-on-covid-19-vaccinations-by-race-ethnicity/>, (accessed December 16, 2021).

6 While this data provides helpful insights at the national level, to date, CDC is not publicly reporting state-level data on the racial/ethnic composition of people vaccinated. CDC also is not reporting the race/ethnicity of people who have received at least one dose by age, limiting the ability to gain insight into vaccination patterns among children.

7 Arizona Department of Health Services, "Demographics: Total Number of COVID-19 Cases (All Time)," <https://www.azdhs.gov/covid19/data/index.php#demographics>, (accessed December 16, 2021).

8 Reyes, E.A., and Rong Gong Lin II, "COVID-19 cases rising among unvaccinated youth, Latinos in L.A. County," *Los Angeles Times*, August 26, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-08-26/covid-cases-los-angeles-county>, (accessed September 20, 2021).

9 Weekly Arizona COVID-19 Data Report, "Researcher Analyzes Arizona COVID-19 Spread Models for Decision-Makers," <https://publichealth.arizona.edu/news/2021/covid-19-forecast-model>, (accessed September 15, 2021).

require masks despite the ban.^{10,11} Considering over 45% of K-12 students in Arizona are Latino, this ban will have a disproportionate effect on the spread of COVID-19 among Latino children and their families.¹² Nationally, more than 5 million children have tested positive for COVID-19.

We enclose an [Arizona-specific fact](#) sheet on a recent [poll](#) we conducted among Latino parents. It reveals key lessons for those seeking to increase vaccination rates among Latino children and families, including barriers to vaccination faced by Latino parents.¹³ Key findings from the poll include:

- Arizona’s Latino parents today feel even more concerned than they did last year about COVID-19’s impact on their family, and support policies to improve their family’s health and financial well-being.
- Health care professionals are key messengers to close vaccination and information gaps among Latino parents in Arizona who are concerned about the vaccine’s safety and side effects on children.
- Financial costs and accessibility concerns weigh heavily on Arizonan Latino parents when thinking about getting themselves and their children vaccinated. For these reasons, Latino parents support policies and approaches to reduce barriers and increase access to vaccines.
- A majority of Arizona’s Latino parents support vaccine requirements in a wide range of settings.

Two recent publications by UnidosUS offer actionable insights and guidance to close vaccination gaps in the Latino community:

- [*Seizing the Moment: Recommended Approaches for Equitable Distribution of COVID-19 Vaccines in the Latino Community*](#). This paper provides actionable insights on how localities are promoting vaccinations in the Latino community.¹⁴
- [*The COVID-19 Vaccines and the Latino Community: Principles for an Equitable Distribution*](#). This paper helps guide state and local leaders to address and mitigate the racial and ethnic disparities in access to COVID-19 vaccines to ensure the nation fully recovers from the pandemic.¹⁵

10 Office of the Governor Doug Ducey, “Governor Ducey Statement On Updated CDC Guidance”, <https://azgovernor.gov/governor/news/2021/07/governor-ducey-statement-updated-cdc-guidance>, (accessed October 19, 2021).

11 Office of the Governor Doug Ducey, “Governor Ducey Announces \$163 Million To Increase Per Pupil Funding In Schools,” <https://azgovernor.gov/governor/news/2021/08/governor-ducey-announces-163-million-increase-pupil-funding-schools>, (accessed October 19, 2021).

12 Arizona Department of Education, “Accountability and Research Data,” <https://www.azed.gov/accountability-research/data>, (accessed October 19, 2021).

13 UnidosUS, “Majority of Latino Parents Support Vaccine Requirements for Kids, Educational Staff to Return to In-Person Schooling,” <https://www.unidosus.org/press-releases/majority-of-latino-parents-support-vaccine-requirements-for-kids-educational-staff-to-return-to-in-person-schooling/>, (accessed October 4, 2021).

14 UnidosUS, “Seizing the Moment: Recommended Approaches for Equitable Distribution of COVID-19 Vaccines in the Latino Community,” <https://www.unidosus.org/publications/seizingthemoment/>, (accessed October 4, 2021).

15 UnidosUS, “The COVID-19 Vaccines and the Latino Community: Principles for an Equitable Distribution,” <https://www.unidosus.org/publications/2149-the-covid-19-vaccines-and-the-latino-community-principles-for-an-equitable-distribution/>, (accessed October 8, 2021).

Given the barriers that Latino parents in Arizona face in vaccinating themselves and their children and the recent authorization of the COVID-19 vaccine for children, we offer the following recommendations to improve the equitable distribution of vaccines in the state.

1) Be intentional about the equitable distribution of COVID-19 vaccines for eligible children, adolescents, and their families. Steps should include:

- **Creating a COVID-19 vaccination plan designed to increase equitable and timely access to COVID-19 vaccines for children and their families.** Following the CDC's [recommendation](#) that children between the ages of 5 and 11 be vaccinated against COVID-19, Arizona's Department of Health Services (ADHS) should develop and implement a vaccination campaign that is tailored to meet the unique needs of young children. Such a plan should follow guidance from the CDC's Pediatric COVID-19 Vaccination Operational Planning [Guide](#) on establishing partnerships between local education, health departments, and community-based leaders to build trust and raise awareness among communities, including the Latino community, disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 about the availability of COVID-19 vaccines for children.^{16,17}
 - **Leverage schools or school districts** that provide routine flu vaccinations or that were successful in providing COVID-19 vaccination to adolescents as vaccination sites for children ages 5-11.¹⁸ According to our poll, the majority of Latino parents in Arizona support approaches, such as holding vaccinations onsite at schools, day cares, and children's sporting events, to reduce barriers and increase access to vaccines.

2) Make information about vaccines easily accessible.

- **Target investments to fund Spanish-language community-based outreach and awareness campaigns** to disseminate information and messaging on vaccines for children. Communication and information to raise awareness about the availability of vaccines for children must be available in families' home languages and conveyed in a manner that is culturally relevant to help families better understand, support, and continue to advocate for their children. UnidosUS's [Esperanza Hope for All \(EHFA\)](#) Mobile Educational Tour serves as a model approach for the state to invest in bringing information about vaccines into Latino neighborhoods.¹⁹

3) Expand data collection and reporting by race and ethnicity.

16 University of Miami Health System and Miami-Dade County Public Schools, "Miami-Dade County Public Schools partners with the University of Miami Health System Pediatric Mobile Clinic to offer COVID-19 testing, school-required vaccines and the COVID-19 vaccine to eligible students," July 20, 2021, <http://pdfs.dadeschools.net/featured/2021/UJ-PEDIATRIC-MOBILE-CLINIC-072021-VACCINE-SCHEDULE-REVISED.pdf>, (accessed October 24, 2021).

17 Cowan, K., "Hillsborough County school district hosting vaccine clinics for students," Fox 13 Tampa Bay. June 11, 2021, <https://www.fox13news.com/news/hillsborough-county-school-district-hosting-vaccine-clinics-for-children>, (accessed October 24, 2021).

18 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Pediatric COVID-19 Vaccination Operational Planning Guide," <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/downloads/Pediatric-Planning-Guide.pdf>, (accessed October 18, 2021).

19 UnidosUS, "Esperanza Hope for All Mobile Educational Tour," <https://www.unidosus.org/esperanzahopeforall/mobiletour/#ehfa-mobile-tour-dates>, (accessed October 7, 2021).

- **Invest in disaggregated data collection, analysis, and reporting by race and ethnicity for children.** Data on COVID-19's impact on Arizona's children and adolescents are limited, making it difficult to know the true extent of disparities and facilitate better decision-making about the health, social, and economic needs of our communities. Yet available data from the CDC show that Latino children are more than three times as likely to be hospitalized for COVID-19 than are non-Hispanic white children.²⁰ For these reasons, state vaccination campaigns must include intentional efforts to enhance disaggregated data collection, analysis, and reporting by specific demographic categories, such as age, race, ethnicity, gender identity, primary language, disability status, and other demographic factors.

4) Reduce structural barriers to vaccine access.

- **Issue guidance to vaccine providers and state and local governments** to clarify that Social Security numbers, government-issued identification, and other documentation are not required for parents to receive a vaccination for themselves or their children. The CDC's COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force has made public their position that U.S. citizenship is not a requirement to receive a vaccine.^{21,22} Yet more than 2 in 5 (42%) of Latino parents in Arizona surveyed had to pay a copay/fee, provide proof of insurance, or present a government-issued identification in order to have their child vaccinated. Further clarifying guidance is needed to ensure that vaccination sites do not turn away Latino parents and their children who may be noncitizens, live in mixed-status households, or lack a government-issued identification.
- **Develop an employer vaccination tool kit** to include suggested best practices for employers to adopt that would reduce barriers and increase access to vaccines for workers with children. According to our poll, Latino parents continue to experience barriers to vaccination for their children, including having to schedule around their work hours and increased concerns about having to miss work.

We hope you share our sense of urgency about the importance of effective strategies to increase vaccination rates among the Latino community. UnidosUS and its Affiliate Network of community-based organizations, including federally qualified health centers, welcome the opportunity to partner with you to share key learnings about proven approaches that would help all Arizona Latino children and families in assuring their equitable access to vaccines.

We would appreciate meeting with you to discuss these and related issues. Please reach out to Arizona Policy Advisor Elizabeth Salazar at esalazar@unidosus.org to find a convenient time.

²⁰ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "Disparities in COVID-19-Associated Hospitalizations Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities,"

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/racial-ethnic-disparities/disparities-hospitalization.html>, (accessed September 20, 2021).

²¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "COVID-19 Vaccines Are Free to the Public," <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/no-cost.html>, (accessed 9.20.21)

²² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), "CDC COVID-19 Vaccine Task Force Position on Citizenship and Residency," CDC, May 3, 2021, <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/citizenship-residency-position.html> (accessed October 7, 2021).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Christina Corieri". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "C" and "R".

CC: Christina Corieri, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Governor Ducey

CC: Callie Kozlac, Associate Superintendent for Policy and Government Relations, Arizona
Department of Education