

REVISED MOTION BY SUPERVISORS HILDA L. SOLIS

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AND JANICE HAHN

Supporting Mental Health for Latino Residents

Barriers to mental health care within Latino communities are causing many residents to suffer in silence. Nationwide, only 36.1% of Latino adults aged 18 or older with a mental illness received services in 2021, compared to the overall U.S. average of 47.2%. Tragically, the suicide rate for Latino adults rose drastically between 2010 and 2020, with Latino men increasing by 35.7% and Latinas increasing by 40.6%.

Cultural tendencies, including machismo, and disparities within the healthcare system prevent members of the Latino and Hispanic community from receiving life-saving mental health services. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, within the Latino community, there is significant stigma when discussing mental health, with many not seeking help or treatment for fear of being labeled as “locos” or feeling shame with having a mental health condition.

Systemic issues, including lack of access, also play a significant role in Latino mental health. According to the National Mental Health Services survey, between 2014

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and 2019, there was a loss of over 1,000 Spanish-speaking health facilities that offered mental health treatment. A study by the American Psychological Association (APA) found that only 5.5% of U.S. psychologists say they're able to administer mental health care services in Spanish, and less than half of psychologists report being knowledgeable about working with Latino patients. The APA also found that bilingual patients are evaluated differently when spoken to in English versus Spanish, resulting in undertreatment of Latino individuals.

This crisis was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw demand for mental health services increase across all demographics of Los Angeles County residents while simultaneously significant numbers of trained mental health professionals left their jobs. Nearly 6 in 10 Latino adults have reported difficulties communicating with a mental health care provider because of a language or cultural barrier. Patients with limited English proficiency (LEP) experience significant barriers to mental health care access, often leading to an increased number of hospitalizations, lengths of stay, and emergency department (ED) visits. The APA also found that demand for full-time bilingual psychologists within the Latino community is expected to surge 30% across the country by 2030, with Los Angeles County having the highest demand. More than 5.5 million L.A. County residents speak a language other than English at home, with 3.8 million residents speaking Spanish.

There are efforts at the federal level to address the disparities experienced by Latino residents. Rep. Grace Napolitano and Senator Alex Padilla have introduced the *Mental Health for Latinos Act*, which would require the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to develop and implement an outreach and

education strategy to promote behavioral and mental health among Latinos. The strategy would provide information on evidence-based practices, interventions, and treatments that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. It would also increase awareness of symptoms of mental illness among Latinos, taking into account differences due to gender identity, age, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. It would also require SAMHSA to report annually to Congress on the extent to which the strategy developed and implemented improved behavioral and mental health outcomes.

At the County, the Department of Mental Health (DMH) has efforts underway to address this significant need, including hiring more Spanish-speaking and bilingual staff. DMH has over 1,500 Spanish-speaking staff, representing over 30% of the DMH workforce. DMH has also partnered with the UCLA HNCE framework Bilingual and Spanish Interdisciplinary Clinical Training Program (BASIC-T) to address the mental health needs of the diverse populations. DMH has also employed over 400 *promotoras* and community health workers to reach out directly to impacted communities in culturally and linguistically appropriate ways to address stigma and break down barriers to care. However, given the rising mental health needs of Latino residents, more must be done to address growing needs and prevent further loss of life.

I-WE, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to:

1. Develop a strategic plan and outreach campaign focusing on the system of hiring and retaining bilingual and Spanish-speaking clinicians, including partnerships with local universities and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs) to develop the workforce pipeline;

2. Analyze the feasibility of building upon programs addressing the County's needs to develop more culturally and linguistically appropriate services, such as the BASIC-T Pipeline Training Program and Continuing Education Program;
3. Explore models for strengthening the collaboration of these efforts with DMH Legal Entities, Training Unit, and DMH Underserved Cultural Communities (UsCCs);
4. Work with CEO on identifying ongoing funding sources to support the above initiatives; and
5. Report back in 90 days on the implementation of these directives.

IWE, FURTHER, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Chief Executive Office - Legislative Affairs and Intergovernmental Relations Branch (CEO-LAIR), in collaboration with the Department of Mental Health, to send a five-signature letter to Representative Grace Napolitano and Senator Alex Padilla, with a copy to the Los Angeles County Congressional Delegation, in support of the *Mental Health for Latinos Act*.

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