

June 30th, 2021

The Hon. James E. Clyburn
Chairman

The Hon. Steve Scalise
Ranking Member
Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis
2105 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

I want to respectfully convey my gratitude for the work the Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis is doing to reduce the disparities identified during the COVID-19 pandemic. My name is Carlos Rodríguez-Díaz, I am a public health scientist, and I am Associate Professor of Prevention and Community Health at The George Washington University – Milken Institute School of public health. In this letter, I am sharing my expert opinion about the experience of Latino communities during COVID-19 and suggestions to increase COVID-19 vaccine uptake in these populations.

Since early in the COVID-19 pandemic, our research team documented that Latino communities were at disproportionate risk for COVID-19 infection and death compared to white communities. These disparities were caused by disproportionate employment as frontline workers, housing conditions, elevated air pollution, and language barriers. These are long-standing social and economic inequities experienced by communities of color in the United States and require urgent attention. Addressing these social determinants of health should be part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic and a permanent priority to improve the health, well-being, and quality of life of minoritized groups.


The vaccine rollout is helping to reduce new infections and deaths associated with COVID-19. However, even as we are among the most eager to receive the vaccine, Latino communities are still facing vaccination barriers that are leaving us vulnerable to infection and disease progression. While vaccine hesitancy has been considered the barrier for vaccine uptake, we are missing the opportunity to understand and address this hesitancy and the causes that have historically left Latino populations with unequal access to health care.

COVID-19 prevention efforts aimed at Latino populations must be strengthened. Latino community leaders should be in the forefront of this response. The strategies that have failed need to change as we aim to reach those who did not respond to them. Language justice is essential as it is to recognize the diversity among Latino populations when developing culturally congruent community-centered interventions. Further, more research with Latino communities is needed, particularly research conducted by Latino scientists.

Other structural barriers to COVID-19 vaccines will require more time, such as improving working conditions, reducing pay inequity, reforming immigration laws, and restructuring our public health system. However, these social and economic determinants of health must be addressed if we want to achieve health equity in the United States and have a different experience when the next pandemic hits us.

I confirm my availability to provide support in the effort you are doing to end the COVID-19 epidemic.

Respectfully,


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