

## **Connecting Health with U.S. Hispanics: Building Relationships That Last**

According to 2011 U.S. Census population estimates, there are now 52 million Hispanics living in the United States, which accounts for 16.7 percent of the U.S. population. From 2000 to 2011, the Hispanic population grew by 43 percent, from 35.5 million Hispanics in the U.S. in 2000. This number is poised to reach 132.8 million people by 2050, with a share population of 30 percent. Even though the Mexican population is only one of many Hispanic groups, it prevails when addressing a “general Hispanic population,” as Mexicans account for 30 percent of all immigrants living in this country.

### **Hispanics and Healthcare**

As a group, Hispanics face a number of challenges when dealing with health issues. Culture, lifestyle, and inheritance make many conditions pervasive among the community.

When dealing with healthcare issues, this segment shows contrasting facts: on the one hand, they have a higher life expectancy, foreign-born Latinos are in better health, they have healthy lifestyles, smoke less than Caucasians, and have a family support and care system that is the norm.

On the other hand, they have a lack of access to medical care and health insurance; some groups have problems adapting and changing their habits, thus lowering their health status; there is a gap in cultural acceptance of new health conditions or diseases, and a lag in prevention access and understanding; there is food insufficiency among many families, due to low income rates and other access issues; and they face higher rates of obesity due to changes in lifestyles once they move to the United States.

In terms of awareness and information, Hispanics feel less informed about many conditions. They also seek health information less often due to language barriers; Hispanic women with limited English proficiency are especially vulnerable in this respect.

Within the Hispanic community, the “doctor” is still seen as an authority figure — and if the physician is from their ethnic group, all the better. Yet Hispanics with limited English proficiency tend to have problems communicating with or understanding their doctors. Language barriers also prevent more than 50 percent of Spanish-speaking Hispanics from understanding both instructions for prescription medicine and written information from a doctor’s office.

In treating health conditions, values such as faith are of primary importance. For many Hispanics, a church is the only place they go on a weekly basis and where they share information with people they know and trust. There is still an emphasis on family over individual, and women are still in charge of the family’s health as male and female roles are clearly defined. Dad is the provider, and Mom takes care of the children and of the elders (if they live at home with them). There is a greater cross-generational interdependence in the family, as seen in many Hispanic families where various generations live together and support each other.

### **Trust Among Hispanics**

On issues related to healthcare, Hispanics trust not only medical professionals and the media, but also community organizations. These local groups are already embedded in the community; they have roots within the population, and Hispanics trust them because they “speak their language” in many ways.

Hispanics also have family and friends as their support system — and any campaign or program that appeals to group dynamics, from social networking to family-centered promotions, has a strong advantage. For this reason, word-of-mouth campaigns and grassroots efforts have proved highly effective as primary drivers for product and services trials when approaching the Hispanic community. Hispanics like to share their experiences with others and like to know what experiences others have had. This group likes to pass information from one to another, a trait that enables community leaders to accelerate communication efforts and create excitement about issues, or to inform about new services or resources at the community level.

Because the female figure is central to the Latino household, Latina moms have a pivotal role in shaping the minds and values of the U.S. Hispanic family. Latinas of all ages make up almost 24 million of the total Hispanic population in the U.S., and though they are outnumbered by males 107 to 100, they have higher college and high school completion rates. Our approach starts with a deep understanding of the culture, values, language, motivations, and behaviors that distinguish this powerful consumer segment, who make the majority of Latino consumer purchasing decisions— estimated at \$860 billion.

Engaging with community health workers or *promotoras* has also been extremely effective. Organizations such as Migrant Health Promotion and Vision y Compromiso, among many others, have a network of educators who visit hard-to-reach populations, and who bring the health conversation and important tools to Hispanic families right where they live.

## Celebrity Spokesperson

One of the most effective ways to reach a target audience is through the use of public personalities who have the credibility to speak on behalf of an organization.

In our experience, it can be difficult to recruit, secure, and maintain celebrity spokesperson relationships. However, their high-profile nature and ability to generate publicity make it well worth the effort. Celebrity spokespeople may take part in media tours, appear at special events, post on blogs, appear in videos, and participate in public service announcements (PSAs), fund-raising events, and advocacy activities.

## Hispanics and Media Usage

With the continuing growth of the Hispanic population in the U.S., Spanish is the nation's *de facto* second language. First-generation Hispanics, who are Spanish-dominant, prefer TV and radio as their trusted sources of information. Stations like Univision, TV Azteca, and Telemundo still reign in ratings among this group.

Second-generation Latinos, usually code-switchers or bilinguals, migrate to bilingual outlets such as blogs, magazines, and TV shows that appeal to younger generations, such as *MTV TR3s*, *Latina* magazine, *V-me*, and *Hissip*, among others. Third, fourth, and older generations are fully assimilated and mostly consume English media. Nowadays, thanks to the *retro-acculturation* phenomenon, these groups also prefer media outlets that reflect their culture and lifestyle. As generations continue to evolve and become more main-stream, Hispanics — especially those in border States or who live in Hispanic neighborhoods — will continue to be code-switchers. History has shown that neighboring communities influence each other; this will continue to happen in large bilingual communities along the United States-Mexico border, and in New York, Chicago, and other cities.

## Hispanics Online

The Hispanic online population reached a record 29.4 million visitors in February 2009, representing 13.5 percent of the total U.S. online market. During the past year, the growth of the U.S Hispanic Internet audience outpaced that of the total U.S. online population in terms of number of visitors, time spent, and pages consumed, as Hispanic online adoption and engagement accelerated. As is the case with youth of many cultural backgrounds, online campaigns are very effective in appealing to younger Hispanics.

## Hispanics and Mobile

Cellular usage among Hispanics is growing at a faster rate than in the population as a whole. According to The Nielsen Company (2011), 93 percent of U.S. Hispanics use a mobile phone regularly and 45 percent utilize smart phones. Despite this, only 20 percent of marketers utilize this channel to reach Hispanics. Given the fact that Hispanics are just starting to recognize ADHD and Autism conditions, personalized and immediate care, medication reminders, etc. on their mobile devices might benefit their health.

Diabetes rates among Hispanics are disproportionately high, especially among the youngest generation of Hispanics. Specifically, Hispanics are 66% more likely to suffer from diagnosed diabetes, according to the American Diabetes Association. Even worse, Hispanics aged 18 to 44 suffered diabetes at over double the national average, according to a CDC report in 2011. Given that over 11% of Hispanics aged 20 or older suffer from Diabetes, it is clearly one of the most pressing public health issues for Hispanics.

## Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiovascular diseases, which include conditions like heart failure and strokes, represent the single largest cause of death to Americans and are disproportionately likely to affect Hispanics. According to the American Heart Association, Hispanics not only suffer from high rates of cardiovascular disease, they also suffer from higher rates of obesity and diabetes, two of the biggest warning signs for cardiovascular disease. Any way one looks at it, the sheer size and scope of this problem is enormous.

## HIV/AIDS

Hispanics, and especially Hispanic males, are also disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS, according to a 2014 CDC report. The CDC estimated that the infection rate among Latinos was 3 times higher than that among whites, with 84% of the new infection rate being males. This is exasperated by the fact that Hispanics are more likely to have intercourse with partners of the same ethnicity. The CDC places the blame largely around socioeconomic factors, as they point out that HIV infection rates are significantly higher for those in poverty or with a lower education level.

## Asthma

Asthma and the Hispanic community is unique in that Hispanics suffer asthma at lower rates than non-Hispanic whites, yet they are more likely than non-Hispanic whites to have visited a hospital for an asthma-

related condition and are more likely to die from asthma. However, one area of the Hispanic population that is highly affected by asthma is the Puerto Rican community, which has asthma at twice the rates of the entire Hispanic community. According to the Office of Minority Health, this is largely because asthma isn't as well diagnosed in the Hispanic community, so generating awareness of this condition is of critical importance.

## **Hepatitis C**

Hepatitis C is a disease that varies widely across the Hispanic community, according to a study recently published in the *Journal of Infectious Diseases*. Specifically, the study found that less than 1 percent of Hispanics from Cuba and South America have suffered from Hepatitis C, but that infection rates were 11.6 percent in Hispanics with a Puerto Rican background. Additionally, the study found that men typically had a significantly higher prevalence of Hepatitis C, although that was common across all ethnicities. The study suggested that a campaign to target Hispanics in cities like Chicago and New York, which have a higher percentage of Hispanics from Puerto Rico.

## **the Affordable Care Act**

Although Hispanics have the highest uninsured rate (30%) among all races, the healthcare expansion brought on by the Affordable Care Act hasn't affected Hispanics as much as other races. A recent Gallup poll found that the percentage of uninsured Hispanics only dropped .8% so far in 2014, compared to 2.2% for African Americans. The website troubles have also affected Hispanics, as the Spanish version of Healthcare.Gov was written in "Spanglish," according to one healthcare worker quoted by the *Washington Post*. However, one area of the law that has the potential to positively affect Hispanics is the Medicaid expansion, as the Kaiser Family Foundation estimated that as many as 9 million Hispanics could eventually gain coverage through the expansion.

## **Increasing Hispanics in the healthcare workforce**

As the California Society of Anesthesiologists found in a recent review of scholarly literature, it is increasingly important for minorities to enter the fields of medicine and science. However, Hispanics have struggled in this front and are far less likely to work in the field of healthcare services. The numbers are somewhat startling, as according to the Sullivan Commission on Diversity in the Healthcare Workforce report, only 4.4% of health information technicians, 2.8% of pharmacists and 1.3% of emergency technicians are Hispanic, rates that are significantly below all other races. One further ominous note is that in 2008, less than 2,900 minorities entered medical school, representing 16% of medical school attendees.

## **Increasing Hispanics in clinical trials**

Hispanic participation in clinical trials is extremely low relative to their size of the population. According to a 2013 FDA study, Hispanics only represented 1% of clinical trial participants, despite representing 16% of the US population. However, the FDA Safety and Innovation Act, signed into law in 2012, is designed to increase minority participation in clinical trials by requiring the FDA to report on the diversity of clinical trials.