

CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TO LATINO CHILDREN REMAIN, BUT SUCCESSFUL EFFORTS OFFER FAMILY FRIENDLY STRATEGIES

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As our nation marks Hispanic heritage month, the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) highlights findings from the recent report, *Challenges and Opportunities in Children's Mental Health: A View from Families and Youth*. The report, now available in both Spanish and English, features strategies that engage families and youth in order to better address the needs of children and families, including those of Hispanic/Latino origin.

"September is a time to collectively reflect on the strengths of all Americans of Latino heritage," said Dr. Janice Cooper, report co-author. "It is also a time to galvanize our efforts in areas where more progress is needed – all too often, mental health services for Latino children and youth are lacking."

Latino children and youth face tough economic odds: an astonishing 61% of all Hispanic/Latino children live in low-income families (8.8 million Hispanic/Latino children), compared to 26% of white children. For children and youth of Hispanic/Latino descent, there are wide disparities in outcomes and access to basic mental health services and supports:

- Children and youth of Hispanic/Latino descent are less likely to receive services for their mental health problems than any other racial group.
- Language barriers further exacerbate access problems.

"But there is also much to be proud of," continued Dr. Cooper. "This report identifies specific strategies that successfully address barriers to access."

In Tampa, Familias Latinas "Dejando Huellas" provides services to families of children and youth who are in need of mental health services and supports. The only Hispanic/Latino chapter of the Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health, it uses health promoters "promoteritas" to conduct health and mental health education in the community.

In Maricopa County, Arizona, under the leadership of Jose Guitierrez Bejarano and Jane Kallal, the Latino Parent Support Group of the Parent Involvement Center significantly increased access to family support services for families of Latino heritage. They worked with the local Regional Behavioral Health Authority to identify disparities in service use and address the need to be more culturally and linguistically relevant.

Youth of Hispanic/Latino descent have also been actively engaged in youth advocacy efforts. The report profiles the work of the California Council on Youth Relations and a model for youth-guided service delivery developed by Youth Motivating Others through Voices of Experience (Youth Move).

To read the full report in Spanish or English, visit www.nccp.org.

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The National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) is the nation's leading public policy center dedicated to promoting the economic security, health, and well-being of America's low-income families and children. Part of Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, NCCP uses research to inform policy and practice with the goal of ensuring positive outcomes for the next generation.