

**Latino**  
POLICY FORUM



**Long-Term Socioeconomic  
Consequences of COVID in  
the Latino Community:  
Creating a Path Forward**

The Latino Policy Forum In Collaboration with Illinois Unidos  
Foreword by The Brookings Institution



**BROOKINGS**

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The Latino Policy Forum, in conjunction with Illinois Unidos, takes full responsibility for the report's content and any errors it may contain.

Dear Reader,

The topic of this report – Latino socioeconomic recovery from COVID – is vital to everyone. It is a complex and many-faceted issue requiring systematic understanding and coordinated responses.

Latino socioeconomic recovery from COVID will not be easily addressed. Latinos' hardships, challenges, and choices underscore a sense of urgency to "fix things."

The stories and situations that drive this sense of urgency highlight the complex socioeconomic conditions of Latinos. These stories include the plight of the stay-at-home mom who lost her 40-year-old husband, and family breadwinner, to the virus. Or perhaps it is the young mother working to put food on the table who spent three weeks sleeping in the hospital because her 3-year-old son was hospitalized with COVID. And while she watched him fight to survive, she knew her baby was ill because her boss did not provide protective equipment: she brought the virus home to her young son. Maybe it is the mom, dad, and their three children who open their home to two other families because those other families would be homeless if they did not. Or finally, it is the mom with "long COVID" whose severe and complicated physical and emotional issues render her unable to work or take care of her family without help: help that she receives from the kindness of people, not from any systematic program.

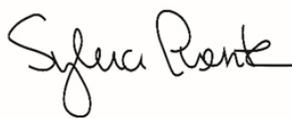
The economic and labor force contributions of Latinos, along with the changing demographics of the Chicago metro region, Illinois, and the nation, require that Latinos' socioeconomic recovery from COVID be a city, county, state, and national priority.

This report outlines a set of policy directions. They are a starting point for dialogue and action aimed at ensuring Latino equity and prosperity; both are essential to the social and economic well-being of our local communities, the state, and the nation.

While this report focuses on Illinois, it is essential to remember that the Illinois Latino community is a representative microcosm of Latinos in the US. Therefore, the action items in this report are scalable and applicable across an array of communities and states.

We want to thank the members of the Advisory Committee, the report's writers, the research, administrative, and communications staff, and the entire team of The Latino Policy Forum and Illinois Unidos. We appreciate the support from and partnership with The Brookings Institution; we thank Gabriel Sanchez and the staff at Brookings. Finally, we want to thank our philanthropic supporters who helped make this work possible.

¡Adelante!



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# BROOKINGS

Foreword by  
Dr. Gabriel R. Sanchez, Rubenstein Fellow of the Brookings Institution

I and other scholars at [Brookings](#) have documented the glaring racial inequalities due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, a growing literature has made clear that Latinos (along with Native Americans and African Americans) have struggled with higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and death throughout the pandemic.

Beyond the direct health implications associated with the pandemic that continue to send far too many Americans to the hospital, with many unfortunately succumbing to their illness, the economic stresses connected to the COVID-19 pandemic have simultaneously and disproportionately harmed the already vulnerable Latino community. This report from The Latino Policy Forum sheds essential light on just how extreme these socioeconomic inequalities are for Latinos in Illinois.

Among the critical findings from the report is that roughly 50 percent of Latinos who live in Illinois currently make less than \$15 per hour, the highest percentage of any racial or ethnic group in the state. At the same time, Latinos are more likely than other groups to face housing insecurity. The findings from Illinois are consistent with what we have found from other states and nationally throughout the pandemic.

For example, early in the pandemic, a survey sponsored by Abriendo Puertas showed that 29 percent of Latino families had experienced job loss due to COVID-19. In addition, there were high rates of Latino-owned business closures. These two conditions helped fuel a sharp rise in unemployment and underemployment among Latinos. Unfortunately, more recent data suggest that Latinos continue to face a wide range of economic challenges. Moving to 2022, a third of Latinos in Colorado report quitting their jobs in the last 12 months due to poor working conditions.

Further, nearly one-quarter of Latinos report that their workload or hours increased without a raise or promotion. Finally, a [statewide survey of Latinos in Colorado](#) fielded in September 2022 found that half of Latinos in Colorado report that their economic situation has worsened in the past 12 months; this is a powerful statistic given how financially difficult 2021 was for the Latino community in the state.

The economic hardships facing Latinos across the nation are driving economic issues to be the dominant theme of the November election for Latino voters. When asked what the most important issue is that elected officials should address, the number one priority identified in a [BSP Research/UnidosUS survey of Latinos](#) was inflation and the rising cost of living. The Latino community across the country is in a vulnerable economic position. It is ill-prepared to absorb any additional financial shocks. In conjunction with the Forum's analysis, these

sobering data provide context for understanding the challenges many Latinos face because of COVID and “long COVID.”

A recent survey of 1,500 Latino parents and primary caregivers sponsored by Abriendo Puertas and UnidosUS helps shed light on how pervasive the socioeconomic challenges are for Latino families across the country. Complementary to the Forum report’s focus on the SES inequalities that have magnified COVID-19 challenges for Latinos, the survey included a follow-up question for those experiencing long COVID symptoms to help assess how this challenge impacts Latino well-being.

Overall, 11 percent of respondents indicated that they suffer from long COVID symptoms; another 9 percent report that their child is experiencing long COVID symptoms, even though they are not. When you add another 5 percent of respondents reporting that both they and their children are experiencing symptoms, we find that long COVID currently impacts about a fourth of Latino families across the country.

Further, the survey uncovered similar economic trends to those noted previously. It also found that Latinas made especially difficult decisions due to financial shocks. For example, 44 percent reported having to borrow money from friends and family, 37 percent reported using up all or most of their family’s savings to help pay for expenses, and 38 percent said they were forced to cut back on family or children’s activities. This is especially pertinent, as over time Latinas have been more likely to lose their job due to long-COVID (24 percent), lose wages due to long COVID (36 percent), and have depression or a lower quality of life due to long COVID (33 percent).

The adverse socioeconomic conditions associated with long COVID are likely to persist for decades.

Not surprisingly, the direct health impacts of long COVID and economic challenges associated with these lingering symptoms are generating high levels of stress among Latino families, already taxed from the past two years of the pandemic. Nearly 30 percent report that long COVID has negatively impacted their quality of life and led to depression. These mental health challenges associated with long COVID add to the existing mental health challenges Latinos are facing. The Forum’s report calls attention to these challenges and offers substantive policy directions for addressing them. We agree with the argument made in the report that the cultural and structural barriers that impact Latinos’ access to mental health services were exacerbated by the pandemic but were present well before the pandemic hit the Latino community.

We hope this report motivates attention to and action on the economic insecurities facing the Latino community in the United States. The consequences of the findings in our collective work on this topic are not limited to the Latino population. In fact, given that Latinos have been a catalyst for many positive economic trends, including increases in homeownership, small business ownership, and labor force participation, all will feel the ramifications of the economic

setbacks detailed in this report. For these reasons, we urge policymakers, elected officials, and advocates to consider and act on the policy directions outlined in this report. If implemented fully, they will significantly assist Latino families across the nation in their economic recovery. That, in turn, will help the country rebound from a devastating economic period that has been harder on Latinos than the general American population.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has created extensive and profound negative impacts on populations across the US. COVID-19 has not only devastated the health landscape in many ways, including over 96 million diagnosed cases leading to over 1 million deaths in just two years. At the same time, COVID has created a socioeconomic crisis that will likely negatively impact many Latinos and each of us for decades to come. This toxic constellation of complex COVID-related conditions requires significant attention and resource allocations.

For Latinos, socioeconomic recovery from COVID is complicated and elusive. There is insufficient attention centering on difficulties Latinos face as they navigate and attempt to recover from the socioeconomic devastation stemming from COVID. This report begins to rectify that situation.

This report focuses on the structural conditions existing pre-COVID that COVID has exacerbated. Ensuring that the Latino community recovers from the socioeconomic impact of COVID requires implementing and evaluating all COVID-related policies and resource allocations through an equity lens.

Specifically, this report centers on the economic, educational, housing, mental health, and workforce challenges confronting Latinos in Illinois as they manage recovery from COVID. The Illinois Latino population can be seen as a microcosm of the nation's Latino population based on a multiplicity of social, economic, and demographic data points. Therefore, the recommendations and conclusions of this report are applicable and scalable to other municipalities, cities, states, and the nation.

The focus on Latinos is needed because before COVID, Latinos were the driving force in the growth of homeownership and labor force participation. In addition, they were making significant gains in educational attainment. For example, in Illinois, Latino homeownership stood at nearly 55 percent. Latinos were opening new businesses and creating jobs. In short, Latinos were significant contributors to overall economic stability and growth in Illinois and the communities in which they live. COVID is functioning as a set of brakes on those gains and advances. That is something the Latino community, the State of Illinois, and the nation can ill-afford.

The policy directions in this report can be motivated by long-standing structural inequities resulting in significant socioeconomic challenges. However, these directions take on a sense of urgency if we are to address the long-term socioeconomic problems created by COVID and ensure economic recovery within all communities, particularly the Latino community.

In understanding what COVID has broken, exacerbated, and exposed, we can place these suggested directions at the epicenter of what must be addressed for an equitable recovery and resurgence from COVID for Latinos.

The following are policy directions aimed at alleviating some of the most corrosive socioeconomic consequences of COVID and long COVID found in the Latino community.

## JOBS

1. Promote and incentivize worker safety protection measures, particularly for those in the low-wage economy.
2. Enhance job training and educational support programs for low-wage workers, particularly for Latino immigrants and essential workers.
3. Ensure that opportunities for training and education prioritize low-wage marginalized workers, regardless of immigration status.

## HOUSING

1. Redefine homelessness to include families/individuals who “double-up.”
2. Increase the number of Latinos receiving housing subsidies through enhanced targeted outreach by community-based trusted partners.
3. Ensure all outreach efforts and program requirements are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

## EDUCATION

1. Create, at all educational levels, culturally and linguistically appropriate programs and interventions designed to mitigate the disruption of educational opportunities produced by the pandemic.
2. Ensure appropriate resources are available for addressing and managing, in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner, the social-emotional needs of students enrolled in educational programs, early childhood through college.
3. Provide appropriate resources to address the digital divide faced by Latino students, parents, and caregivers.
4. Provide requisite economic and educational support to ensure Latinos can re-enroll in educational programs, early childhood through college.

## MENTAL HEALTH

1. Increase the pipeline of Latino mental health care workers by:
  - a. Creating economic and educational incentives for Latinos to enter psychology and social work programs leading to careers in mental health professions.
  - b. Providing resources to train more community-based Latino paraprofessional mental health workers.
2. Increase the number of mental health services and programs serving the Latino community.

3. Expand the capacity and use of mental health services and programs by using community-based trusted Latino partners to enroll people and provide appropriate services.
4. Ensure immigration status is not a barrier to accessing linguistically and culturally appropriate mental health services at little or no cost to those using the services.

#### DISABILITY AND DEATH BENEFITS

1. Expand the definition of disability to include the long-term physical and mental health consequences of COVID.
2. Ensure that anyone with a COVID-related/caused disability is eligible for all disability benefits, regardless of immigration status.
3. Reconfigure the eligibility requirements for Social Security survivor benefits so that the children and spouses of all workers, regardless of immigration status, are eligible for all such benefits.

## Introduction

### Early 2022

One Latina during a community conversation described what she saw in her community: “I also worked a few times at a food bank. When I went it was very impactful, seeing the huge line of cars waiting for food. We saw folks who had been evicted, who lost their homes, who took out loans to pay their debts, who had huge medical costs not related to COVID-19, and don’t know how to pay it, and others who had COVID-19 still have symptoms and need medical care that they are not able to pay. Most of them are undocumented and don’t have access to resources and benefits. We need for the government to step in and see that these are people from our community. They need to give them basic access to benefits, to be able to go to a doctor’s appointment when they have a medical problem. I have seen some of their bills, they are very expensive—how will they be able to pay that? A lot of times we don’t know where to find help. Sometimes for undocumented folks, they are scared to ask for help because of fear of their immigration status. So, I think the community needs more access to resources and education.”

Without a doubt, the COVID-19 pandemic has created extensive and profound negative impacts on populations across the US. COVID-19 has not only devastated the health landscape in many ways, including over 96 million diagnosed cases leading to over 1 million deaths in just two years. It also has created numerous long-term health-related conditions now referred to as post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2 (PASC), colloquially known as “long-term” or “long COVID.” Increased awareness and [resource allocations](#) directed to the long-term health consequences of COVID have yet to produce a concise agreed-upon definition of the complex medical conditions associated with long COVID. Whether people are diagnosed with severe illness due to COVID or are [asymptomatic](#), it is clear that [many](#) experience PASC.

At the same time, COVID has created a socioeconomic crisis that will likely negatively impact many Latinos for decades to come. This toxic constellation of complex COVID-related conditions requires significant attention and resource allocations.

**A mother at a community conversation noted: “Many could not pay the rent, others ... got into debt. People have no idea how they are going to pay off these debts.”**

There is a widespread belief that the COVID socioeconomic recovery is well underway. And for [some sectors](#) of society, that appears to be true. Nonetheless, the socioeconomic recovery for Latinos is complicated and elusive. There is insufficient attention centering on difficulties Latinos face as they navigate and attempt to recover from the socioeconomic devastation stemming from COVID. This report begins to rectify that situation.

Specifically, this report centers on the economic, educational, housing, mental health, and workforce challenges confronting Latinos in Illinois as they manage recovery from COVID.<sup>1</sup> The Illinois Latino population can be seen as a microcosm of the nation's Latino population based on a multiplicity of social, economic, and demographic data points. Therefore, the recommendations and conclusions of this report are applicable and scalable to other municipalities, cities, states, and the nation.

The focus of this report is the array of structural conditions existing pre-COVID that have been exacerbated by COVID.<sup>2</sup> Ensuring that the Latino community recovers from the socioeconomic impact of COVID requires implementing and evaluating all COVID-related policies and resource allocations through an equity lens.

This forward-looking report identifies policy directions that public and private entities should take to ensure Latinos have a fair and just socioeconomic recovery. While this report offers an array of policy directions, it should be noted that there are limitations to what is offered here. It does not address or discuss all relevant issues, and the policy directions suggested here are not exhaustive for those issues which are addressed.

## Why the Focus on Latinos?

It is undisputed that COVID continues to produce adverse long-term health, economic, educational, housing, mental health, and workforce consequences. These impact the nation, families, communities, cities, states, and institutions and organizations such as schools. And communities most disproportionately affected by COVID are the communities that will bear the highest long-term costs. Latinos have been one of the most adversely affected groups in socioeconomic terms, and along some metrics (e.g., rates of cases, percent of deaths to those of working age), the group most adversely affected. These facts provide one good reason for a focus on Latinos.

### In 2019 it was noted:

*“The economic contribution of the U.S. Latino community will become increasingly important moving forward to the economy”*

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1 While this report focuses on the Latino community, it can and should function as a model for addressing the socioeconomic consequences of COVID found in other marginalized communities across the state of Illinois and the rest of the country.

2 Although not within the scope of this report, it is important to note that many individuals, families, philanthropic organizations, and community organizations within the Latino community demonstrated strong agency and actions to mitigate some of the most deleterious consequences facing Latinos during the pandemic.

The focus on Latinos is also justified because before COVID, Latinos were the **driving force** in the growth of homeownership and labor force participation. In addition, they were making significant gains in **educational attainment**. For example, in Illinois, **Latino homeownership stood at** nearly 55 percent. Latinos were opening new businesses and creating jobs. In short, Latinos

Hispanic buying power has grown substantially over the last 30 years, from \$213 billion in 1990 to \$1.9 trillion in 2020. Hispanic buying power accounted for 11.1% of U.S. buying power in 2020, up from only 5% in 1990.

-University of Georgia

were significant contributors to overall economic stability and growth in Illinois and the communities in which they live. COVID is functioning as a **set of brakes** on those gains and advances. That is something the Latino community, the State of Illinois, and the nation can ill-afford.

The gains and contributions made by Latinos underscore the reasons why the health and prosperity of Latinos are necessary conditions for

overall socioeconomic growth and prosperity. Reasons why the health and recovery of the socioeconomic sectors in the city of Chicago and the surrounding region, the state of Illinois, and the rest of the nation require a robust, healthy, and economically stable Latino population **include:**

- Among the highest rates of **labor force participation** of any racial or ethnic group
- Consumer spending power is significant and greater than their proportion of the population
- A significant economic and entrepreneurial growth engine throughout the country
- One of the fastest-growing demographic groups nationwide
- Overrepresentation of essential workers across multiple labor sectors

**Job loss, illness, long-term disability, and death of working-age parents creates a cascading set of negative consequences for decades.**

## Background: COVID's Impact on Latinos in Illinois

Since early 2022, in Illinois and across the nation, we have seen a convergence of the rates of diagnosed COVID cases among Latinos, Blacks, and Whites. In Illinois, for example, as of August 2022, those three groups have **case rates** nearing 23,000 per 100,000 persons. However, these converging case rates still significantly outpace the case rate in Asians, which is about 17,000 per 100,000 persons.

But that is not how the COVID story began, nor how the socioeconomic impacts should be understood or assessed. In Illinois and across the nation, beginning in mid-to-late April 2020 and

continuing through early 2022, the rate of diagnosed COVID cases among Latinos far outpaced the rate of diagnosed cases among other racial/ethnic groups.

In Illinois, by August 2020 Latinos had a [diagnosed COVID case rate](#) about 51 percent greater than Black people and 293 percent greater than Whites. And because in Illinois Latinos were, and still are, the racial/ethnic group [least likely](#) to be tested, it is reasonable to assume that the Latino case rate was and still is far higher than officially reported.

## 2022

**“My niece and nephew are alone. My niece is only 9 months old, and his son keeps asking about my brother all the time.”**

**A Latina at a community conversation spent a lot of time talking about the death of her 39-year-old brother. She spoke of the family loss and the economic loss, but the loss to her niece and nephew was indescribably heartbreaking and incomprehensible to her and her family.**

A non-exhaustive list of the complex reasons for the low testing rates among Latinos includes job loss, loss of pay related to time off to be tested, fear of sharing information with a government entity, health care settings that are not always as responsive to those whose first language is not English, lack of linguistically and culturally appropriate<sup>3</sup> outreach and education initiatives, and costs, as well a paucity of [easily accessible](#) testing sites.

Another disturbing impact of COVID in the Latino community is the percentage of diagnosed cases among people of working age, i.e., the age group 20-59. In Illinois, 65 percent of diagnosed COVID cases among Latinos are in those aged 20-59.

This is about 5 percent greater than the percentage among Black people and 14 percent greater than it is for Whites.

These data underscore the importance of examining the socioeconomic impact of COVID on Latinos. It is those in the working-age group who are most likely to be in the paid labor force and raising a family. The loss of income, due either to death or disability, ensures that a family's economic stability is more tenuous than ever. That precarious financial condition creates obstacles to home ownership, the ability to secure stable housing, and post-secondary education, limiting enhanced job and income opportunities.

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<sup>3</sup> The phrase “culturally and linguistically appropriate” is used in this document to characterize effective, equitable, understandable, and respectful services responsive to diverse cultural beliefs and practices, preferred languages, health literacy, and other communication needs.

## Why Was COVID So Devastating to Latinos?

### 2022

Some answers are found in the words of Latino community members themselves:

“We struggled because my husband worked for a moving company where he was constantly in contact with people. The decreased hours of work were a big impact because we did not have enough money for food.”

“Many of us could not pay out rent, others, more brave, not knowing what to do, they got into debt. We are using credit cards to pay the rent. Many people got into debt, if not with the rent and bills, with their medical bills.”

“For real, the pandemic has had a big impact on our lives. It is something we were not prepared for, physically or mentally.”

“Before we paid the rent on time, after the pandemic, the checks have not been the same. Once we received the money, we had debts and there was not enough money.”

“I knew a lot of people who really, really needed help. But because of fear due to immigration status, they didn’t ask for the assistance.”

“The first couple of stimulus checks my children didn’t receive because my husband and I pay taxes with ITIN.”

The encapsulated answer: structural conditions that existed pre-COVID, and that were exacerbated, and continue to be exacerbated, by COVID. These structural conditions contribute to the presence of Latinos in low-wage jobs<sup>4</sup> with little opportunity for advancement. Because of the pre-pandemic employment context in which many Latinos were locked, their economic ability to forgo working and rely on savings, or, alternatively, to work safely, was limited. At the start of the pandemic, [half of all Latino households](#) had less than \$500 in cash reserves and only about [15 percent](#) of Latino workers could work from home. That rate is among the lowest for all racial/ethnic groups.

The employment and economic conditions of Latinos placed them at high risk for exposure to and disease from SARS-CoV-2.

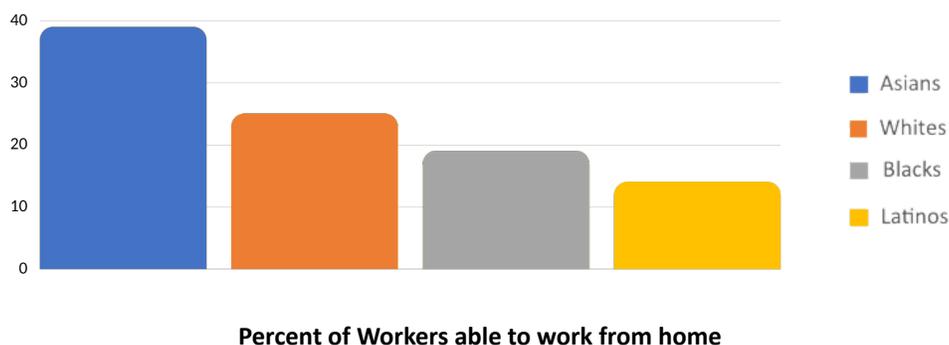
[Ghosh, et al.](#) found two conditions that aptly describe a significant portion of Latino households:

...overcrowded and multigenerational households were associated with increased rates of suspected severe COVID-19 cases, after accounting for both socio-economic factors, which may increase the risk of infection with SARS-CoV-2 and clinical factors that may lead to more severe COVID-19 disease.

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<sup>4</sup> These jobs include ones designated as essential as well other types of jobs such as those that are temporary, contract services, part of the cash economy or in the gig economy.

## Percent of Workers Able to work from Home by Select Race/Ethnicity June 2021



US Data Source: <https://www.epi.org/blog/only-one-in-five-workers-are-working-from-home-due-to-covid-black-and-hispanic-workers-are-less-likely-to-be-able-to-telework/>

Mitigating the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic required pre-pandemic proportionate access to and participation in publicly funded social welfare programs. Latinos had the lowest participation [rates](#) in those programs, and that lack of involvement was especially [acute](#) among persons with immigrant family members. When federal COVID-related financial assistance became available, immigration status once again left many Latinos behind. One’s immigration status (e.g., undocumented; newly arrived) or that of a household member kept many Latinos from qualifying for an array of COVID-related services and supports designed to mitigate the potentially devastating economic impact of COVID.

Finally, the lack of or limited access to culturally and linguistically appropriate education, healthcare, mental health care, housing services, and other public and private sector support services contributed to COVID’s disproportionately negative impact on Latinos.

To mitigate the long-term socioeconomic consequences of COVID for Latinos, the conditions and structural inequities that made COVID so much worse among Latinos must be addressed.

### August 2022

**One low-wage Latino restaurant worker observed: “Before the pandemic they (customers) ignored us or thought we were not as good as they were, then the pandemic came and we were heroes, then we got blamed for getting people sick, and now we are blamed for not going back to work. When the service is slow, they (customers) say it is because Latinos do not work, but when the next pandemic comes, we will still be paid low wages but they will again call us heroes.”**

## Jobs

Mitigating the long-term socioeconomic impacts of COVID among Latinos requires a focus on jobs. The very nature of the jobs that Latinos tended to hold before the pandemic made it worse than it otherwise would have been.

Currently, as well as before and during the pandemic, many Latinos work in [low-wage occupations](#): they are, for example, cooks, laborers, truck drivers, and retail workers. This means that many Latino workers were employed, and continue to be employed, in jobs that put them at high risk for exposure to the virus and disease development.

Before the pandemic's start, Illinois' Latino population had a labor force participation rate of approximately [70 percent](#), the highest of any racial or ethnic group; nationally, at about [67 percent](#), it was among the highest of any racial or ethnic group. Many also worked in jobs with [dangerous working conditions](#). For example, [analysis](#) shows that specific [jobs](#) in which Latinos are disproportionately represented carried the highest risk of excess mortality from COVID:

Workers in the food and agriculture sector faced the highest excess mortality—far greater than health care workers—suggesting that not only exposure but also on-the-job protections affect health risks.

In addition, the proportion of Latinos earning less than \$15 per hour is the among the highest of all racial/ethnic groups, and when compared to Whites, Latinos continue to experience the widest pay gap. A [2022 report](#) finds:

The United States has long had a race-based wage gap, where workers of color receive lower pay than their white peers for the same job, task, or role. This pay gap is the widest between white and Hispanic/Latinx workers, where for every dollar earned by a white worker, a Hispanic/Latinx worker earns 73 cents. This pay gap is especially striking given that Hispanic/Latinx workers comprise the largest proportion of workers after white workers in the United States. At the national level, white workers make up 63 percent of the workforce; of the remaining 37 percent of workers, Hispanic/Latinx workers represent nearly half that number, accounting for 17 percent of the workforce.

Before the pandemic:

- Latinos accounted for more than [20 percent](#) of low-paid *essential* workers, i.e., frontline workers such as those working in meat processing plants or manufacturing plants
- In [2019](#), almost 2/3 of all Latinos ages 18-64 in the labor force were low-wage workers
- Latino workers [had insufficient opportunities or options](#) for job training and upward mobility
- [Immigration status](#) has been weaponized to threaten and control Latino workers

These pre-pandemic structural working conditions guaranteed that a disproportionate percentage of the Latino-working population would be disadvantaged in a pandemic.

January 2021

A community member's story represents the labyrinth of housing, economic, and immigration challenges many Latinos faced from the start of the pandemic.

One Latina lives in a small house with her parents, spouse, two children, and her sister and two nephews. Her mother and father are undocumented; everyone else was born in the US. Her mother stays at home to take care of the house, cook, and watch the children, while every other adult living in the house works. Only one was able to work from home. She reports that her father, who works at a candy factory in the Chicago area, was told by the plant manager that if he took a test for COVID, they would "...call immigration on him." Shortly after that conversation, he and the entire household became ill with COVID. She said her father continued to work even while he was sick because he feared being deported. And despite public health masking rules that were in place, no non-management workers in the factory wore a mask; they were told it was not allowed.

Latinos are [overrepresented](#) in jobs [characterized](#) by erratic schedules, minimal benefits, no option of working from home, and a severely elevated risk for exposure to and infection from SARS-CoV-2. These essential workers enabled those who could work from home or economically absorb the loss of employment or wages to stay safe, as their risk of exposure to COVID was limited.

Across the country, many Latino low-wage, essential workers were not provided with personal protective equipment (PPE) or safe working conditions, contradicting public health rules and regulations. [This](#) is dramatically illustrated by what was happening to Latinos working in jobs related to the food supply chain (e.g., grocery store workers; factories; meat and poultry processing plants). The stories of Latino workers in Illinois and across the nation getting sick and dying on these jobs were legion.

What occurred at a tortilla factory in Chicago underscores what many Latino essential workers confronted, especially during the first year of the pandemic. [Reporting](#) from that factory noted:

...[employees say](#) the company has ignored COVID-19 safety guidelines from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, resulting in 85 workers getting sick. At least four have died.

In September of 2021, the strategic campaign organizer for Arise Chicago said the company at the beginning of the pandemic...didn't allow anyone to use face masks.



## 2021

A Latina who works as a housekeeper shared that there are nine people representing three generations living in her home. They live in a three-bedroom house that is about 1,100 square feet. She asked: “How we are supposed to isolate? We need to work, we live together because we cannot afford to live apart, so my choice is to be homeless or risk everyone getting sick, how is this fair?”

The pre-pandemic structural conditions of Latino employment made the pandemic far worse for Latinos than it should have been. But for Latinos, the “recovery or exit” from the pandemic has seen little change in the structural conditions of employment or employment patterns.

Many Latinos are still employed in [low-wage jobs](#); and low-wage workers are especially vulnerable to economic hardship. This is

particularly true if they rely primarily or appreciably on their wages to cover basic living expenses and do not have a clear path to higher wages. There is general agreement that earning less than \$15 per hour places a person in a low-wage job. Currently, about 50 percent of Latinos in Illinois earn less than \$15 per hour, the highest percentage among racial/ethnic groups. In addition, as discussed above, these low-wage jobs are often dangerous or threaten worker health and safety. Moreover, these jobs offer little or no opportunity for [advancement](#), and therefore do not lead to upward mobility for workers.

Latinos’ socioeconomic recovery from the pandemic requires that they become less economically vulnerable. Their economic vulnerability can only be mitigated with access to programs that provide Latinos in the low-wage labor market with the training and skills needed to move into labor sectors that offer more economic security.

Given these employment conditions, pre-COVID as well as during COVID and the COVID recovery period, three initial policy directions are imperative for improving the socioeconomic conditions of Latinos. These policy directions are an essential first step toward a more equitable economic recovery for Latinos:

1. Promote and incentivize worker safety protection measures, particularly for those in the low-wage economy.
2. Enhance job training and educational support programs for low-wage workers, particularly for Latino immigrants and essential workers.
3. Ensure that opportunities for training and education prioritize low-wage marginalized workers, regardless of immigration status.

## Housing

The housing conditions in which many Latinos live - tenuous housing stability, overcrowding, multigenerational living arrangements, or homelessness, broadly construed - are a significant reason the pandemic so disproportionately affected Latinos.

The economically tenuous housing conditions in which Latinos find themselves are vividly illustrated in an analysis by the Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard University. That report found that about **48 percent** of Latino renters in Illinois are housing cost-burdened<sup>5</sup>, with almost 25 percent being severely housing cost-burdened. When **comparing** Illinois' White and Latino populations, we find that about 14 percent more of the Latino population is housing cost-burdened.

Housing options and stability are tied to economic resources. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that the housing conditions of Latinos who were most likely to be exposed to the virus and therefore ill from COVID tended to exacerbate the risk of household spread. **Household spread** of the virus contributes to high infection rates among Latinos.

In March 2020, public health officials began repeating a mantra to follow specific isolation protocols to stem the spread of COVID. Specifically, public health officials were regularly repeating that isolating yourself at home, if you worked, were exposed to the virus, or felt ill was the best way to slow the spread of the virus and protect those in your household. These protocols were reasonable and seemed easily followable. However, for many Latinos, they were unrealizable.

The public health directive for protecting family members and mitigating the virus' familial spread required secure, stable housing with adequate space to isolate if needed. Unfortunately, this is not an apt description of the housing conditions of many Latinos. A **language coordinator** working with Latinos in the District of Columbia noted:

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<sup>5</sup> Housing cost-burden is an index of housing insecurity. A household is defined as housing-cost burdened if more than 30 percent of household income is used for housing costs, and moderately housing cost-burdened if 30-50 percent of household income allocated to housing costs. A household is severely housing cost-burdened if more than 50 percent of its income is used on housing.

We know not everyone can say, ‘Okay, I’ll just stay in my room’ or ‘I have my own bathroom,’... We understand what the reality is.

Sufficient space to isolate from others living in the household was key to stopping the in-home spread of COVID. For many Latinos working in [jobs with a significant risk of exposure](#) to the virus, isolating themselves at home was necessary to ensure that the household spread of COVID was limited; but Latinos are the racial/ethnic group most likely not to have sufficient space to isolate at [home](#).

In addition, more than a quarter of Latino households are [multi-generational](#). As noted earlier, [research](#) has shown that multigenerational living situations are an independent risk factor for a more rapid virus spread.

Another housing risk factor for the rapid spread of COVID is homelessness. While Latinos have a homelessness rate of less than 1 percent, this does not accurately reflect the number of homeless Latinos. The lack of an accurate picture of Latino homelessness is due to the [Latino homeless paradox](#): Latinos who face eviction or foreclosure are likely to be “taken in” by family members. This action is as known as “doubling-up.” This is partly due to the strong familial ties and cultural norms dictating that one helps family members in need.<sup>6</sup> Doubling-up exacerbates housing conditions that increase the household spread of the virus, thereby increasing illness, hospitalization, and death rates.

In terms of housing policies designed to address and redress homelessness, there is no consideration of “doubling up.” The people being taken in are, in fact, homeless but for the generosity of others, but that generosity provides a veneer that minimizes the housing needs of Latinos. If someone is sleeping in a home, they are not officially defined as homeless. Yet, to access homeless prevention services, you cannot have a place to live. These policy limitations produce the following situation: Latinos who are “doubled up” are [precluded from receiving services and support](#) that would help prevent or eliminate their homelessness. This, in turn, means that many Latinos helped by their family are not receiving the support designed to decrease homelessness and provide opportunities for long-term housing stability.

Official definitions of homelessness and the Latino experiences of homelessness do not align. With such misalignment, mitigating long-term homelessness among some Latinos is an elusive goal.

But it is not just the official definition of homelessness that has hindered Latinos from receiving necessary housing support. As with all public social services programs, the pool of applicants is dependent on outreach efforts. Ensuring that as many people as possible who need assistance are in the applicant pool requires that those designing and implementing the programs and

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<sup>6</sup> While this report is focusing on the Latino community, we would be remiss if we did not point out that members of other racial/ethnic communities also follow the moral imperative to take care of family members in need.

those charged with outreach and enrollment are trusted by potential applicants. While good faith efforts were made to incorporate feedback from Latino housing providers in the outreach and application process in Illinois, housing assistance results have been less than optimal. For example, in 2020, Latinos in Illinois, despite being the group that suffered the highest [rate](#) of COVID-related job loss or wage reductions, received only [12 percent of Emergency Rental Assistance](#) and [17 percent of Emergency Mortgage Assistance](#). And while improving culturally and linguistically concordant outreach is likely to enhance Latino participation, it must be noted that many Latinos themselves thought this program was too good to be true, and so did not apply. One participant in a community focus group pointed out, succinctly:

...too many people did not apply because they thought it was too good to be true and did not want to waste their time.

[Analysis](#) by The Latino Policy Forum centering on Illinois concluded that more creative and effective outreach efforts to enroll Latinos are needed to distribute a fair proportion of desperately needed rental assistance to the Latino community. To be truly effective, these efforts must be culturally and linguistically appropriate. Specifically, governmental agencies should partner with more Latino and immigrant-serving community-based organizations. While many such groups may not specialize in housing, they are experts in community outreach, especially outreach to those in precarious circumstances. In addition, these types of organizations have already gained the trust of their communities and possess the language skills required to ensure that households receive secure, fair assistance.

The Forum's analysis points to the importance of ensuring government and community partnerships with trusted community-based outreach workers; they are the best way to increase Latino enrollment in programs, including housing-related initiatives.

COVID dramatically exposed that living conditions made it difficult for many Latinos to isolate at home. In addition, COVID underscored the gaps in housing services and the depth of housing insecurity and homelessness within the Latino community, all of which made the pandemic far worse for Latinos than it otherwise would have been.

To address those gaps and redress precarious living conditions, the following policy directions aimed at providing equitable, stable, and secure housing for Latinos are recommended:

1. Redefine homelessness to include families/individuals who "double-up."
2. Increase the number of Latinos receiving housing subsidies through enhanced targeted outreach by community-based trusted partners.
3. Ensure all outreach efforts and program requirements are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

## Education

The pandemic's disruption of educational opportunities is well [documented](#), as is the [disproportionate](#) impact it has had on Latino students, particularly English Learners (ELs). These disruptions have exacerbated long-standing structural inequities.

A recent [opinion piece](#) by education advocates noted:

For decades...Latinos pushed hard to get national, state, and district leaders to prioritize the education of Latino students, and it was paying off... Unfortunately, the pandemic has set us back several years.

A 2022 [report](#)<sup>7</sup> issued by Advance Illinois focuses on the sharp decline in enrollment numbers that is associated with COVID:

**In state-administered early education and child care programs, the decline in enrollment between 2019 and 2021 for Latino children was about 20 percent; this is nearly 43 percent greater than the decline in enrollment for White children.**

...the available data tell us any way you slice it, the pandemic has had a dramatic impact on enrollment, especially, though not exclusively, on our youngest learners and in community colleges.

At nearly every level of education, Illinois saw declines in enrollment that exceeded historical trends and demographic shifts.

The report reinforces that within Illinois, the pandemic is magnifying and intensifying pre-existing structural inequities that students of color and their families confront:

The pandemic has also had a deep impact on how K-12 students accessed instructional opportunities and developed social-emotional skills...[The pandemic] altered the educational trajectory of students, children, and families in Illinois and worsened existing gaps in opportunity and outcomes along lines of race and ethnicity...

Data specific to [Latino enrollment](#) in Illinois schools include:

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<sup>7</sup> This section of the document relies heavily on the data in the Advance Illinois report.

**For many Latinx students and their families the social and emotional impact of the pandemic has been significant. While it has not decreased their commitment to attending four-year colleges and universities, it has caused some of their college selection choices to be more focused on being closer to home.**

**Elissa Halpern, Director of College Persistence, College Bound Opportunities (Illinois)**

- PreK-12 public school enrollment between 2019 and 2022<sup>8</sup> declined by approximately 4 percent
- Between 2019 and 2020, there was a 17 percent decline in Latino enrollment in Illinois community colleges - prior to that period enrollment was steady or increasing

The [implications](#) of the decline in community college enrollment for economic and occupational opportunities are far-reaching. With such a significant decline, the concern is that there will be a correlative decline in educational attainment over the next decade.

**Despite declining enrollments at all other educational levels, [Latino enrollment](#) in four-year public colleges and universities in Illinois between 2019 and 2020 increased by about 5 percent.**

The causes for declining enrollment and disrupted learning opportunities for Latinos during the pandemic result from pre-pandemic structural conditions. To reverse the decline in enrollments, schools and community-based programs must understand the demands on young Latinos' lives and formulate remedies accordingly. A [Latino urban educator](#), talking with researchers from Advance Illinois, captures the complex demands on these students that were found in the school year 20-21:

We saw with most of our minority and low-income students is they had responsibilities—older siblings taking care of younger siblings, some kids had jobs—they weren't in remote learning by spring. They just stopped coming. We learned more about the complexity of their lives. We understood better how important the work is that we do, but also how much there is that is required of our kids. It's not that they didn't want to come—their whole families were counting on them.

Impediments to educational opportunities for Latinos occurred from early childhood education through college. Mitigating these requires that attention be given to the unique challenges affecting the Latino community.

As for all marginalized communities, the [digital divide](#) in the Latino community is acute. However, distance learning posed special challenges for Latino students and their parents. For example, because of the overcrowded housing conditions in which many Latino families live, the ability of students to isolate or retreat to a quiet place with no disturbances is limited. At the same time, distance learning requires up-to-date hardware and software and access to a high-speed internet connection. All of these were, and still are, in short supply in many Latino households.

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<sup>8</sup> The 2022 data are preliminary data from the Illinois State Board of Education.

Another distinguishing challenge faced by many Latino students is [language proficiency](#). Again, turning to the Advance Illinois 2022 [report](#), we learn:

Evidence is already mounting that English learners have been among the students hardest hit by COVID-19's disruptions to in-person learning.

For young English Learners, the [challenges](#) posed by distance learning now require that they be given additional support and services as they return to in-person learning.

Another challenge is the limited-English proficiency of a [parent](#) or caregiver. This limited proficiency often hindered the ability of parents and caregivers to [communicate](#) with teachers and other school personnel. Many parents' or caregivers' lack of computer skills and access to hardware and software exacerbated these communication issues.

Additionally, there are significant social-emotional issues that students are now facing.

And like many other concerns, the mental health difficulties impacting Latino students [before](#) the pandemic have been exacerbated by it. Further, a recent [study](#) has highlighted the decline in Latino students' ability to access appropriate school-based mental health services and providers.

The following [synopsis](#) of how the pandemic impacted the mental health of Latino students requires a strong response. However, there is a dearth of mental health workers, especially in schools, who can address the pressing mental health needs of Latino students:

The pandemic has upended children's lives and, for some, harmed their mental health. Researchers and social workers say Hispanic children may be especially vulnerable to emotional struggles, and the ramifications could be long-lasting. The crisis has introduced a variety of stressors into the lives of children and teens: disrupted daily routines, food insecurity, isolation from peers because of school closures, increased responsibility to watch over siblings and fear of the virus itself, among other things. Latino children may be at greater risk of psychological ramifications in large part because of what their parents are experiencing. A survey by the American Psychological Association found that people of color, particularly Hispanic adults, were more likely to report higher stress levels due to the pandemic. Nearly 2 in 5 Hispanic adults reported experiencing a great deal of stress.

## Early 2022

**One Latina mother at a community conversation noted: "I worry a lot about the mental health of the kids. My daughter told me that now that the kids have gone back to school, they are really bad. They are more rebellious, there is more bullying."**

Although the educational experiences of Latinos have been compromised and made more complicated by the pandemic, there are reasons for optimism. It is well known that Latinos

place a [high value](#) on education and see it as a gateway to [economic stability and security](#). Nonetheless, ensuring that Latinos reestablish the pre-pandemic levels of educational attainment requires investment at all levels of education.

The policy directions recommended in this report represent some essential ingredients in redressing the pandemic's impact on the education of Latinos:

1. Create, at all educational levels, culturally and linguistically appropriate programs and interventions designed to mitigate the disruption of educational opportunities produced by the pandemic.
2. Ensure appropriate resources are available for addressing and managing, in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner, the social-emotional needs of students enrolled in educational programs, early childhood through college.
3. Provide appropriate resources to address the digital divide faced by Latino students, parents, and caregivers.
4. Provide requisite economic and educational support to ensure Latinos can re-enroll in educational programs, early childhood through college.

## Mental Health

The mental health consequences of the pandemic are far-reaching and severe. The [American Psychiatric Association](#) noted an increase in stressors triggering mental illness among Latinos stemming from the pandemic. These include:

- Anxiety from not being able to follow the recommendations for best protecting themselves from COVID
- Grief over the loss of friends and family members
- Separation from friends and family, especially those who are sick or in the hospital, and the potential inability to communicate with health care workers because of a lack of shared language competency
- Unequal access to technology, inhibiting work, school, or social interactions online
- The increased emotional stress of close living situations and finding childcare
- The financial stress associated with increases in health care costs and lost wages due to COVID
- Ongoing difficulties accessing health care services

### Early 2022

**As one Latina at a community conversation reported: “I have seen how issues with mental health have risen, in adults as it has in children. I would like to see more counseling, more clinics that take individuals. A lot of individuals don’t have insurance, and it’s hard for them to get access. It is also hard to get counseling in Spanish.”**

The cultural and structural barriers surrounding mental health services to Latinos have been exacerbated by the pandemic but were reified before the pandemic began.

**Cultural barriers** include the stigma associated with accessing mental health services, lack of English proficiency, and concerns regarding cultural misunderstanding. For example, the cultural bias against seeking mental care is **found** among young Latinos, such as college students, as well as older Latinos. In addition, some evidence suggests that Latino family caregivers perceive a stigma related to the fact that family members have been diagnosed with specific mental health issues.

These cultural barriers converge to create challenges best treated by mental health workers who can empathize with and fully understand the bases of the cultural biases, and in understanding these impediments, work with Latinos in need of services to ensure that appropriate mental health care is delivered.

For Latinos, one of the most significant **structural barriers** to accessing mental health services is the lack of health insurance coverage. In 2019, approximately 20 percent of non-elderly Latinos were underinsured; this is among the highest rates of underinsurance among all racial/ethnic groups. Latinos have an uninsured rate that is 43 percent higher than Black people, 61 percent higher than Whites, and 64 percent higher than Asians. This lack of health insurance precludes the ability of many Latinos to pay for mental health care. Additional structural obstacles include limited access to transportation, childcare arrangements, and the ability to take time off work.

Another barrier to mental health services for Latinos is the lack of providers who can provide culturally and linguistically appropriate care. For example, a report by the **Kaiser Family Foundation** estimates that, as of September 2021 in Illinois, only about 24 percent of mental health care needs are being met due to shortages of mental health care workers. They further note that about 28 percent of mental health care needs are met in the US. And they further state that these levels of unmet mental health needs are far greater among racial/ethnic minorities.

Latinos are approximately 18 percent of the nation's population, but about **12** percent of currently licensed social workers and approximately **14** percent of newly graduated social workers are Latino. And at the start of the pandemic, only about **5 percent** of psychologists were Latino. Nationwide, between 2014 and 2019, while the Latino population grew, the proportion of facilities that offered mental health treatment in Spanish **declined** by almost 18 percent. Illinois was no exception to this pattern. Spanish-speaking mental health care services may not be required by all or even most Latinos. However, the decline in Spanish-language mental health services is understood to be a reason Latinos do not seek out services as they fear providers will lack an understanding of the stigma many face and associate with mental health care.

Because securing mental health services can be expensive and require sharing private personal information about one's life and family members, special consideration must be given to immigrants, especially the undocumented. Because the income of Latino immigrants is below that of Latino non-immigrants, the economic burden on immigrants is likely far greater than on non-immigrants. In addition, the political environment, which is often characterized by threats and a vitriolic attitude toward immigrants, can be another barrier that may impact immigrants' willingness to seek mental health services. Despite laws that promise confidentiality in the provision of mental health services, many fear that sharing personal data about self or family outside of a tight circle will provide the government or employers information that could be used against them or their families.

For Latinos, these cultural and structural barriers, and the inter-animation between them, requires an increase in the number of trusted professional and [paraprofessional](#) mental health care workers. An infusion of such mental health care workers is needed if we are to surmount these obstacles in linguistically and culturally appropriate ways.



An effective way to address the lack of Latino professional mental health care providers is to create and fund programs for those interested in pursuing this field. In addition, [paraprofessional](#) mental health care workers should be trained to identify those in need, provide initial care and support to those not requiring immediate acute care, and work with patients and family members in navigating the myriad of potential structural and cultural impediments facing Latinos in need of and seeking mental health care.

To best ensure that all Latinos can receive appropriate mental health care services, the following policy directions are recommended:

1. Increase the pipeline of Latino mental health care workers by:
  - a. Creating economic and educational incentives for Latinos to enter psychology and social work programs leading to careers in mental health professions.
  - b. Providing resources to train more community-based Latino paraprofessional mental health care workers.
2. Increase the number of mental health services and programs serving the Latino community.
3. Expand the capacity and use of mental health services and programs by using community-based trusted Latino partners to enroll people and provide appropriate services.
4. Ensure immigration status is not a barrier to accessing linguistically and culturally appropriate mental health services at little or no cost to those using the services.

## Disability and Death Benefits

Post-acute sequelae of SARS-CoV-2, known as long COVID, is characterized by new, continuing, or recurring symptoms that occur four or more weeks after initial coronavirus infection. This condition can last months, years or even cause permanent disability in some cases. This set of cardiac, respiratory, neurological, and psychiatric diagnoses means that many who initially had COVID are now unable to work or even care for their family.<sup>9</sup>

While there is no firm or even agreed-upon definition of long COVID, there is consensus among medical providers that the long-term consequences of COVID are **debilitating**, at least for some.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that 1 in 13 adults (7.5 percent) has long COVID symptoms. In addition, the **CDC notes** that long COVID is most prevalent among Latinos:

[n]early 9% of Hispanic adults currently have long COVID, higher than non-Hispanic White (7.5%) and Black (6.8%) adults, and over twice the percentage of non-Hispanic Asian adults (3.7%).

Working-age Latinos - identified for this report as those between the ages of 20 and 59 - represent the most productive earning years and the years when a person is most likely to be raising children. This age group had and continues to have high rates of COVID. Many of them are so debilitated that they can no longer work and require economic assistance. Housing,

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<sup>9</sup> The Biden administration has taken some steps allowing for long COVID to be considered a disability. For example, they are requiring employers to provide disability accommodations to workers with long COVID per the Americans with Disabilities Act.

education, medical, and food bills must be paid. Regardless of their immigration status, they and their families need economic support to survive.

In [Illinois](#), almost 1/3 of Latinos who have died from COVID are between the ages of 20 and 59; for Blacks who have died from COVID about 21 percent are aged 20-59, and 8 percent of deaths to Whites occurred in the 20-59 age group. The high percentage of Latino deaths in this age group means large numbers of children, over 98 percent of whom are US-born, have lost a wage-earner parent, a primary caretaker, or both. It is estimated that [nationally](#) Latino children<sup>10</sup> lose caregivers to death from COVID at double the rate of White children.

When death or disability occurs, dependents often are afforded [Social Security Survivor Benefits](#). For many, this source of economic support has helped ensure that they do not descend into poverty and are provided with options that ensure a stable future. The death and disability benefits programs operate under [regulations](#) about who is eligible. However, at this point, the regulations do not take into account COVID-related disability. In addition, [immigration status](#) complicates eligibility for these benefits. Yet accessing these benefits is, for some Latinos, a necessary condition of economic recovery. To ensure Latinos have access to all relevant benefits, immigration status cannot be used as a criterion of access.

The following policy directions are recommended as an initial basis for structuring economic assistance designed to mitigate the consequences of the pandemic:

1. Expand the definition of disability to include the long-term physical and mental health consequences of COVID.
2. Ensure that anyone with a COVID-related/caused disability is eligible for all disability benefits, regardless of immigration status.
3. Reconfigure the eligibility requirements for Social Security survivor benefits so that the children and spouses of all workers, regardless of immigration status, are eligible for all such benefits.

## Early 2022

**A Latina mother at a community conversation raised the simple question of what is going to happen to families, especially if they are undocumented, where people are sick long term: “There are people that are now sick in their lungs and have to get treatment for the rest of their lives. A lot of times they are people who are undocumented who don’t have access to health insurance. What is going to happen to those families, how will this impact people who still haven’t been able to catch up after the pandemic?”**

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<sup>10</sup> All children in a racial/ethnic minority group lose caregivers at anywhere from 2 to nearly 4 times the rate of White children.

## Policy Directions: Summary

Many issues addressed in the previously suggested policy directions were present well before COVID. The policy directions can be motivated by long-standing structural inequities that have resulted in significant socioeconomic challenges. However, these directions take on a sense of urgency if we are to address the long-term socioeconomic problems created by COVID and ensure economic recovery within all communities, particularly the Latino community. In understanding what COVID has broken, exacerbated, and exposed, we can place these suggested directions at the epicenter of what must be addressed for an equitable recovery and resurgence from COVID for Latinos.

To recap, the following are policy directions aimed at alleviating some of the most corrosive socioeconomic consequences of COVID and long COVID found in the Latino community:

### JOBS

1. Promote and incentivize worker safety protection measures, particularly for those in the low-wage economy.
2. Enhance job training and educational support programs for low-wage workers, particularly for Latino immigrants and essential workers.
3. Ensure that opportunities for training and education prioritize low-wage marginalized workers, regardless of immigration status.

### HOUSING

1. Redefine homelessness to include families/individuals who “double-up.”
2. Increase the number of Latinos receiving housing subsidies through enhanced targeted outreach by community-based trusted partners.
3. Ensure all outreach efforts and program requirements are culturally and linguistically appropriate.

### EDUCATION

1. Create, at all educational levels, culturally and linguistically appropriate programs and interventions designed to mitigate the disruption of educational opportunities produced by the pandemic.

2. Ensure appropriate resources are available for addressing and managing, in a culturally and linguistically appropriate manner, the social-emotional needs of students enrolled in educational programs, early childhood through college.
3. Provide appropriate resources to address the digital divide faced by Latino students, parents, and caregivers.
4. Provide requisite economic and educational support to ensure Latinos can re-enroll in educational programs, early childhood through college.

## MENTAL HEALTH

1. Increase the pipeline of Latino mental health care workers by:
  - a. Creating economic and educational incentives for Latinos to enter psychology and social work programs leading to careers in mental health professions.
  - b. Providing resources to train more community-based Latino paraprofessional mental health care workers.
2. Increase the number of mental health services and programs serving the Latino community.
3. Expand the capacity and use of mental health services and programs by using community-based trusted Latino partners to enroll people and provide appropriate services.
4. Ensure immigration status is not a barrier to accessing linguistically and culturally appropriate mental health services at little or no cost to those using the services.

## DISABILITY AND DEATH BENEFITS

1. Expand the definition of disability to include the long-term physical and mental health consequences of COVID.
2. Ensure that anyone with a COVID-related/caused disability is eligible for all disability benefits, regardless of immigration status.
3. Reconfigure the eligibility requirements for Social Security survivor benefits so that the children and spouses of all workers, regardless of immigration status, are eligible for all such benefits.

## CONCLUSION

A [2018 Wall Street Journal op-ed](#) succinctly stated how centrally important, economically strong, and vibrant Latino communities are within all municipalities, states, and the nation:

...Latinos in this country...they are not only our neighbors, colleagues, and friends; they are the foundation of what I call America's New Mainstream Economy.

And a 2021 [analysis](#) from The Latino Policy Forum underscores why the priority for creating an economic path forward for Latinos is a necessary condition for the economic health of all:

The pre-pandemic socio-economic gains by Latinos, the release of the preliminary 2020 census data, and the roller coaster that is COVID all together provide an opportunity to understand how COVID is far more than a health issue. It is a threat to the ability of the Latino community to extend their pre-pandemic gains in educational attainment, income, and labor force participation, among others...Two studies provide a [detailed](#) and [illuminating](#) story of the pre-pandemic Latino gains and contributions. Prior to March 2020, both nationally and in Illinois, Latinos were making impressive socioeconomic strides...[P]ressure also must be brought to bear on elected officials and policymakers to ensure that resources directed at fixing what COVID has broken must reflect both the socioeconomic importance of the communities and the severity of the damage COVID has done to them.

Finally, a newly released [economic report](#) notes:

The dramatic economic contribution of Latinos is a phenomenon that impacts every corner of the nation.

This report, *Long-Term Socioeconomic Consequences of COVID in the Latino Community: Creating a Path Forward*, paints a vivid picture of the long-standing structural inequities confronting Latinos exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. Those inequities, particularly in their COVID-magnified state, pose a significant threat to the vibrant role played by Latinos in the social and economic life of municipalities, states, and the nation. Prioritizing the policy directions in this report is a necessary initial step in responding to this threat.

## Early 2022

**One Latina during a community conversation summed up what she thought ought to be the priorities of government: “The government has to put more focus on the communities that have low-vaccination rates, poor school attendance, that have violence and poverty. More attention in the communities that have higher needs.”**

## ***Appendix A***

### *Methodology*

In cooperation with Illinois Unidos, the Latino Policy Forum convened an advisory group of leaders from various professions and disciplines to identify some of the most pressing socioeconomic issues and barriers facing the Latino community as it recovers from the COVID pandemic. In addition, they identified policy priorities and directions to guide the actions of both the public and private sectors.

The project team also undertook the following actions:

- Literature review
- Interviews/meetings with individuals and groups to gather data (e.g., doctors, nurses, home health workers, family caretakers, promotores, physical therapists, labor leaders, workers, employers, teachers, and housing experts)
- Review of legislation and executive orders - both those that were enacted and those that have failed to gain traction
- Secondary data analysis
- Community conversations with people who are experiencing the long-term socioeconomic consequences of COVID