QUESTION 7: Which health care services do Latinos have trouble obtaining?

ANSWER: Hispanics generally have less access than non-Hispanics to primary care services that are critical to their overall health, as well as ancillary services such as mental and dental health care and prescription medicines.

REDUCED ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Hispanics are less likely than non-Hispanic Whites to access and receive mental and behavioral health services and treatment.

- Among adults ages 18 and older in 2005, non-Hispanic Whites were about twice as likely (15.1%) as Hispanics (7.8%) to receive mental health treatment or counseling (see Figure 1). That year, among adults with a major depressive episode, only half of Latinos (50.2%) received treatment, compared to about two-thirds of Whites (67.2%).
- Among children under age 18 with mental health or behavioral problems in 2003, nearly three-fifths of all Latino children (57.8%) did not receive needed care, compared to about one-third of their White peers (35.3%).
- Disparities in diagnosis contribute to the problem. One study found that among patients with symptoms of depression, physicians were significantly less likely to detect the condition in Hispanic and non-Hispanic Black patients than in non-Hispanic Whites.

POOR ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE

Latinos of all ages have poor access to dental services; poor oral health outcomes impact overall health and well-being.

- According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Latino children ages 2–17 are less likely (62.7%) than their non-Hispanic White peers (78.6%) to have visited the dentist within the past year, the minimum recommended standard for maintaining good oral health.
- Among subgroups of Latino children, Mexicans are the least likely (59.7%) to have had a dental visit, followed by Central or South Americans (65.7%), Cubans (69.6%), Puerto Ricans (71.8%), and all other Hispanic subgroups combined (70.5%).
- Latino adults are even less likely than children to have adequate access to dental care. About half of all Hispanic adults (49%) reported having had at least one dental visit in the past year, compared to about two-thirds (66.8%) of non-Hispanic Whites. Among Latino adults, Mexicans (43.9%) were the least likely to have received dental care (see Figure 2).

PROHIBITIVE COST OF NEEDED PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

Latinos are more likely to have trouble accessing medications prescribed by their health care providers.

- One study found that working-age Hispanics were more likely (16.5%) than non-Hispanic Whites (11.2%) to report not buying at least one prescription drug due to cost issues, a statistically significant difference.
- Researchers found that the disparity widens among people with one or more chronic conditions (see Figure 3). While there is no significant disparity between Latinos and Whites who are uninsured or have public health coverage, Latinos with private insurance are more likely to report this problem than Whites with private coverage.
- While the vast majority of children needing prescription medications in 2003 were able to receive them, Hispanic children were about twice as likely (1.8%) as non-Hispanic White children (0.8%) to not receive all needed prescription medications.
Endnotes

1 The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to refer to persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race. Furthermore, unless otherwise noted, estimates in this document do not include the 3.9 million residents of Puerto Rico.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.


11 Ibid.


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