



# 2020 Issues Platform: A Roadmap for Stronger Communities and a Stronger America

2019 UNIDOS US CONFERENCE EDITION



## ABOUT US

UnidosUS, formerly the National Council of La Raza (NCLR), is the nation's largest Latino civil rights and advocacy organization. Through our unique combination of research, advocacy, programs, and a national network of nearly 300 community-based Affiliate organizations across the country, we simultaneously challenge the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos in the United States.

## INTRODUCTION

Hispanics have been part of the fabric of America since its founding. Today, [one in every five people in our country is Latino](#), and the community at its core is defined by family, hard work, and service to the nation. Latinos have helped build America's cities, put food on its table, energized small business creation, and broken new ground in science, art, and civil rights. We have the [highest workforce participation rate](#) in the country, and are a solid and growing share of our active-duty military personnel. A fast-growing segment of the American electorate, Latino [voters participated](#) in record numbers in the 2018 midterm election, and will be the largest minority voting bloc in 2020. Latino voters want a president that embraces the nation's diversity, has a plan to expand equal opportunity, and advances real solutions particularly in the economic, health, and immigration arenas.

Latinos are essential to the nation's progress, but too many current policies and actions are obstructing rather than invigorating the magnitude of those contributions. An engine of America's working class, Latinos' top priorities have consistently included bread-and-butter issues critical for families to thrive like jobs, health care, and education. Today, jobs and health care top Latino voters' priorities, according to a recently released [poll by UnidosUS](#). While unemployment is low, the instability, poor quality, and low pay of available jobs continue to challenge our families' ability to make ends meet. This is a driving economic concern for Latino voters, more than half of whom worry they will not be able to afford a home or keep the one they own, or won't be able to afford college or pay off student loans. And while the Affordable Care Act has allowed more Latinos to be insured, high costs place coverage beyond the reach of too many families: half of Latino voters report delaying or skipping a visit to the doctor, or buying medicine, because of cost.

Hispanics are also experiencing an intense assault through the toxic anti-Latino and anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies at the core of the Trump administration's politics of division—a concern for eight in 10 Latino voters. Latinos are bearing a disproportionate brunt of aggressive deportation and family separation tactics that undermine the stability of millions of American families and U.S. citizen children. Furthermore, anti-immigrant sentiment is being used to erode the civil rights of all Latinos, eight of 10 of whom are United States citizens. Latino U.S. citizens have endured having their citizenship questioned, and sometimes being detained and even deported, because of the color of their skin. And this anti-Latino sentiment was also a factor in this

administration's deplorable response to assist our fellow Americans after Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico—an attitude that persists almost two years later, as demonstrated by recent threats to withhold federal funds to support the island's recovery.

The first edition of the UnidosUS 2020 Platform reflects Latinos' vision for the nation in areas that are crucial for the well-being of all Americans, and provides tangible recommendations to help our country tap the strength of one of our greatest national assets: America's diversity.

We believe that stronger communities make a stronger America, and in partnership with the local leadership of our community-based [Affiliates](#), we are driving solutions and proposals to move the country forward. For those who care about advancing an economy that works for the many not just the few, healthy communities, humane immigration policies, and good schools, among other top areas—the growth of the Latino electorate should be a welcomed development, because these are the issues that move our voters.

## ECONOMY: LATINOS WANT GOOD AND DIGNIFIED JOBS

The United States's reputation as the land of opportunity is based on the belief that hard, honest work is the ticket to building a better life, no matter where you started. But despite their hard work, many Latinos still struggle to make ends meet each month. As a group, Latinos have consistently high labor force participation rates and income has risen for many, but wages have not. Further, since 2016, our nation's economic policies have benefited the wealthy at the expense of many of these workers, showering tax benefits on investors, corporations, and wealthy individuals. Not surprisingly, of the registered Latino voters we polled, almost half ranked jobs and the economy as their top issue. Economic issues should be at the forefront of any candidate's campaign, and their plans to continue strengthening the economy should specifically include strategies to close gaps between Latinos' economic position and those of other groups.

### 1. Support Working Parents Struggling to Make Ends Meet

Access to safe and affordable child care is essential to many parents' ability to keep a steady job and achieve economic security, but it is financially out of reach for many. Child care is one of the largest expenses in a family's monthly budget, and often costs more than housing, transportation, or food. Caring for a child should never be a burden or a barrier to keeping a job, and too many Latinos have to make extra sacrifices to balance their work obligations with the families they're working to support.

#### ***Recommendations***

- Substantially increase federal direct assistance programs and improve federal tax credits, especially the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Child Tax Credit, and Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.



- Provide investments that will make high-quality child care affordable to everyone, including low- and middle-income families.
- Ensure that all children receive high-quality child care that respects and supports the culture and home language(s) of children and families.
- Expand availability and access to high-quality child care for infants and toddlers.
- Support workers who provide child care by improving wages and providing professional development and training opportunities.

## **2. Support Workers with Health or Family Emergencies**

No American worker should be forced to choose between their job and caring for their children and family members. Most working people in the United States do not have access to paid family leave or sick leave, and may have to take unpaid time off, or risk losing their jobs, in case of an emergency. Latinos are especially affected, with [only one-quarter of Latino workers having access to paid family leave, compared to half of White workers](#). All workers deserve support from their employers to manage the demands of both their jobs and the families. Without family or medical leave, the racial wealth gap widens, and even further prevents Latinos from obtaining the economic security and stability that they work so hard to achieve.

### ***Recommendations***

- Establish inclusive paid leave policies following the birth or adoption of a child, and to accommodate serious illness of a worker, or a worker's family member.
- Provide for 12 weeks of paid leave with a high salary replacement rate of 80% or more.
- Ensure paid leave policies protect workers' jobs and are universally available to all workers.

## **3. Make Housing Affordable and Homeownership Attainable**

The American Dream of homeownership is a symbol of safety, stability, and security and an aspiration for most families. It is also the greatest source of wealth in the Latino community, but too many Latinos are excluded from attaining homeownership because of rising housing costs and limited access to credit. Latinos also often struggle to find affordable rental options. Instead, they are shut out from the stability, economic opportunity, and security provided by affordable housing. Hard working Latinos have a right to live in dignity, in safe neighborhoods where they can send their children to good quality public schools if they choose and families can sleep peacefully with a strong roof over their heads.

### ***Recommendations***

- Alleviate rent burdens by developing and preserving affordable rental housing units and tax credits that help reduce rent rates.

- Address the lack of housing supply by establishing a dedicated fund for the construction of affordable rental housing and increasing investment in the Federal Housing Trust Fund.
- Promote access to low down-payment mortgage options, update mortgage underwriting systems, integrate housing counseling and financial coaching into the mortgage process, and improve the Federal Housing Administration mortgage insurance program.

## IMMIGRATION: LATINOS WANT ALL IMMIGRANTS TO LIVE SAFELY AND PEACEFULLY

The U.S. immigration system is long overdue for sweeping immigration reform that is modern and upholds American values of justice, fairness, and a commitment to shared prosperity and family unity. Our leaders must commit to delivering immigration reform that simultaneously **restores the rule of law** by creating a roadmap to legalization and citizenship for 11 million aspiring Americans, and promoting smart enforcement that improves safety, supports legal immigration channels, and prevents discrimination; **preserves the rule of law** by creating workable legal immigration channels that reunite families, strengthening our economy, and protecting workers' rights; and **strengthens the fabric of our society** by adopting proactive measures that advance the successful integration of new immigrants.

### 1. End All Family Separation Policies

No loving parent or guardian should ever have their children taken away from them. Family separation policies potentially cause lifelong damage to the children, many of whom are U.S. citizens, and severely hurt Americans' trust in the government. [Nearly six million American children](#)—an entire generation—are threatened with having a parent or loved one taken from them because of current unjust immigration policies. These policies must end immediately, and immigrants and all American families should never live in fear of family separation.

#### **Recommendations**

- Restore protections for longtime residents through updated and well-planned policies to protect DACA and TPS recipients, as well as parents of American children.
- End the costly and ineffective use of worksite enforcement actions, stop the use of expedited removal in the interior of the country, and terminate harmful federal regulations threatening the health and housing needs of American children.
- Pass the *American Dream and Promise Act of 2019*, providing permanent protections for Dreamers and TPS holders.
- Pass the *Family Reunification Act of 2019* to reactivate Section 245(i) of the Immigration and Nationality Act. This bill would allow many longtime residents the opportunity to get right with the law, provided they have a qualifying family relationship, submit to criminal background checks, and pay a fine.

## 2. Restore Trust in Immigration Law Enforcement

Because of the Trump administration's current tactics, both immigrants and American citizens fear and distrust the forces that are supposed to help and protect them. In addition, indiscriminate enforcement practices have contributed to an immense backlog of immigration court cases, and it continues to grow, leaving families' fates in the balance for indeterminate lengths of time. Increasing the number of immigration judges and prioritizing resources and immigration court dockets consistent with sensible enforcement priorities are necessary and immediate first steps. However, our outdated immigration laws need to be completely modernized to ensure the lasting changes needed.

### ***Recommendations***

- Ensure that immigration enforcement practices do not frustrate public safety or lead to abuses by targeting immigrants indiscriminately.
- Authorize remedial relief to U.S. citizens who are targeted, arrested, and imprisoned by immigration enforcement authorities.
- Adopting a statute of limitations on old transgressions and enhance due process and anti-racial profiling protections in enforcement practices and particularly in problematic gang databases.
- Remove the obstacles that the Trump administration has put in place to make it harder, costlier, and more time consuming for immigrants to apply for green cards and citizenship.
- Allow individuals with American children and spouses who meet the requirements for cancellation of removal to proactively apply for provisional status, while working with Congress to make relief under that provision of law accessible to more people.

## 3. Weave New Americans into the Fabric of the Nation

As we see in the news constantly, the journey many people take to reach American soil can be long, dangerous, and traumatizing. People who have shown commitment to contributing to the country should not be left alone to navigate their new home. To make sure all immigrants have an equal opportunity to contribute to American society and culture, we need brand new policies that promote their integration into the mainstream.

### ***Recommendations***

- Pass the *New Americans Success Act of 2019* and establish a National Office of New Americans within the Executive Office of the White House with a strong mandate to create and implement a coherent immigrant integration strategy across federal agencies.
- The Office of New Americans should establish a "Race to the Top" grant program that encourages best practice models in the economic, linguistic, and civic integration of immigrants.

## HEALTH: LATINOS WANT TO BE HEALTHY AND THRIVE

Our health is our most important asset and is influenced by various factors, including where we live, work, learn, and play. Ensuring Latinos have the building blocks to good health, such as affordable, quality health coverage and care, good nutrition, and positive social and emotional support will ensure that our community and our country can be healthy and reach its full potential. Despite progress on various fronts, Latinos continue to face challenges to achieving optimal health. For example, the Affordable Care Act brought health coverage to four million Latino adults and more than half a million Latino children. Since 2016, however, Latinos have witnessed relentless political attacks on the nation's health care system by congressional lawmakers more interested in tearing down President Obama's legacy than helping Americans care for themselves and protect the health and wellbeing of their children and families. Today nearly 10 million Latinos are living without health insurance, and will be burdened with exorbitant medical bills—or will not seek medical attention for fear of cost—if they get sick. Meanwhile, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 2016, nearly one in five Latino adults were food insecure, compared to just one in 10 White, Non-Hispanics. The rate for Latino children was even more pronounced, with one in four living in a food-insecure household compared to one in eight White, Non-Hispanic children. Despite these challenges, recent health care policies at the national level have resulted in more harm to these children than good. We want to see health policies and programs that work for Latinos and all Americans.

### **1. Improve Access, Participation, and Enhance the Quality of Health Coverage and Care for Families**

Any national health reform proposal should first seek to do no harm and at a minimum build upon the gains achieved. The ACA has led to widespread coverage for Latinos for the first time, but gaps remain. For example, millions of Latinos are shut out of health coverage because of their immigration status and have few quality, affordable options available. Meanwhile, the cost of even the most basic plan can be a barrier of entry for many and one of the main reasons Latinos remain uninsured and face worse health outcomes. High out-of-pocket costs contributes to worse health outcomes, and more than one in five Latino adults report going without needed care due to cost, compared to one in 10 White adults. In addition, how health care is delivered can limit the quality of care, especially if it does not address the unique circumstances and needs of individuals. For example, more than 25 million Americans are not fluent in English, and their health care will be limited if they can't find a doctor who speaks their language, or if they can't fully understand their prescribed treatment.

#### ***Recommendations***

- Specify that under any coverage expansion, everyone living in the United States is eligible for quality, affordable coverage, regardless of immigration status, including immigrant children and DACA recipients.

- Expand eligibility for Medicaid and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) to all children living in the United States who are income-eligible, regardless of immigration status.
- Enhance existing tax credits for more low-income earners to open coverage up to many who remain uninsured.
- Future cost-sharing assistance ought to consider all family members when determining both eligibility and level of assistance, regardless of their immigration status.
- Ensure culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate care for all consumers, and that people of all ages and ethnic groups have equitable access to culturally competent, in-language provider networks regardless of where they live or what language they speak.

## **2. Increase Access to Nutrition Supports for Children and their Families**

No one should go hungry in America, especially children. Increasing access to healthy, affordable food is an important issue for millions of Americans, particularly Latinos. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, in 2016, food insecurity affected 15.6 million U.S. households, with Latino families being disproportionately impacted. In fact, [nearly one in five Latino adults were food insecure](#), compared to just one in 10 White, Non-Hispanics. The rate for Latino children was even more pronounced, with one-quarter living in a food-insecure household compared to one in eight White, Non-Hispanic children. Federal nutrition programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) play critical roles in closing gaps in hunger and improving the health and economic security of our communities—and should not be threatened with cuts or onerous requirements. SNAP serves more than 40 million Americans, including 10 million low-income Latinos and just under half of WIC participants are Latina.

### ***Recommendations***

- Increase the current SNAP benefit allotment so that it better reflects the reality of the cost of food, preparation time, and access to grocery stores.
- Increase investments in culturally responsive and linguistically appropriate outreach and enrollment efforts targeted to the Latino community.

## **3. Enhance Federal Investments in Mental Health for Children and Caregivers**

All children should feel loved, safe, and valued. Unfortunately, for too many of America’s children, including Latino children, this is not the reality. Whether it is the effects of discrimination, toxic stress, fear, and anxiety from immigration enforcement, or some other form of trauma, various forces are threatening our children’s physical and emotional well-being and their ability to thrive in the future. Events over the past few years have served to exacerbate existing gaps in our nation’s mental health infrastructure and while some progress has been made in policy, systems, and



practice, more must be done to ensure approaches are equitable, culturally responsive, and healing-centered.

### ***Recommendations***

- Scale culturally responsive strategies that build on the assets of Latino families and communities to support positive social and emotional well-being.
- Invest in and promote research that explores the unique needs and circumstances of Latino children and their social and emotional well-being.
- Invest in and expand the mental health workforce to meet the growing and diverse needs of Latino children and those who care for them.

## **EDUCATION: LATINOS WANT EQUAL ACCESS TO A QUALITY EDUCATION**

Having an equal opportunity to succeed begins with equal access to a quality education. Latino parents know this well and value their children's education as a top priority. Though graduation and college-entry rates for Latinos have grown over the past few decades, inequality between Latinos and other Americans remains and achievement gaps are persistent. Moreover, since 2016, the federal role in ensuring equal access to quality education for all Americans has been diminished and the nation's commitment to educational equality for historically marginalized and disenfranchised communities has waned. Within the next decade, Latino youth will account for one-third of all students. Our success as a nation depends on their success as future business leaders, creators, philanthropists, parents, workers, lawmakers, and taxpayers. If we can ensure schools are receiving resources to support the students with the highest needs, and are held accountable for the success of all students, our vision of a strong, diverse America will be achieved within a generation.

### **1. Let All Students Start on an Even Playing Field**

Some young children enjoy the luxury of being prepared for kindergarten thanks to early childhood education programs. For various reasons, young Latinos often begin school less ready to learn than their White classmates. Latinos have the lowest enrollment in early childhood programs, and begin their school lives at a disadvantage. In order to close the achievement gap, our policies should be directed towards ensuring that all kindergarteners enter their first day of school ready to learn and on an even playing field.

### ***Recommendations***

- Increase funding for Early Head Start and Head Start programs to serve more eligible children.
- Expand eligibility guidelines to reach families at 150% of the poverty line.
- Provide a national scholarship program to increase the number of Hispanic ECE teachers with a B.A. degree

## **2. Give Latino Students from Diverse Communities an Equal Chance to Succeed Academically**

A child's ZIP code should not determine their future, and we are committed to making sure all schools are providing quality education across the country. Latino students tend to be concentrated in areas with schools that receive fewer resources, have lower graduation rates, and also have fewer teachers who look like them. As a result, average math and reading test scores are lower for Latino students than White students. To give each student the attention and care they need to succeed, funds and resources have to be invested equitably to ensure high-need students are met with higher levels of service.

### ***Recommendations***

- Expedite enforcement of financial transparency measures in the Every Student Succeeds Act to ensure resource equity and incentivize weighted pupil formula in states, which gives more funding for high need students.
- Ensure all Latino students are proficient and on track to be college and career ready by ninth grade.
- Invest in parent engagement programs designed to reach parents who traditionally are not connected to the schools.
- Increase grants to states to help English learners attain English proficiency and better integrate into the school system.
- Diversify teacher workforce to represent more Latinos and reward dual language educators.

## **3. Higher Education: Improve college completion for Latino students**

Latinos value higher education and are attending college and university in record numbers. But many Latinos are first-generation college students and sometimes arrive without the support needed to guide them through the rigors of college or with additional family demands that affect their ability to focus solely on their studies. Though more Latinos are attending college, too many are not earning degrees, either due to dropping out or because they are enrolled for longer than six years. With the proper support, college achievement gaps will close, and Latinos will graduate with degrees that will help them build economic security and contribute to the prosperity of the nation.

### ***Recommendations***

- Provide first-generation, DACA, TPS, and undocumented students with culturally competent academic and nonacademic support services such as cultural resource centers, Dreamer resource centers, mentors, and mental health providers.
- Institute grant programs to cover students' unplanned, small-dollar financial emergency needs, including for technology, security deposits, car breakdowns, emergency travel costs, health expenses, unexpected student fees, among others.
- Strengthen and expand the public loan forgiveness program.

## CONCLUSION

The Latino community is young and resilient. It has made America stronger and will continue to do so well into the future. Polls consistently show that Latinos believe in good government and a role for government in taking care of people. History shows that when government fails to provide adequate support to the Latino community, organizations like UnidosUS and our community-based Affiliates, step in to partner with government to break-through barriers and create an even playing field for all. Leaders who hope to improve our government ought to promote strategies that recognize the role that community-based institutions and national organizations play in caring for the needs of families and children in neighborhoods.