

UNIDOS US

The First 100 Days: Latino Inclusion in the Biden Administration's First Steps

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INTRODUCTION

Latino* voters made their voices heard in the historic 2020 election, with a turnout that exceeded expectations, especially in battleground states such as Arizona. An estimated 15 million Hispanics voted in the election and made up at least 13% of the total electorate, making Latinos the second-largest group of voters in the country. Regardless of party affiliation, there was remarkable agreement among all Latino voters [on the issues](#) they want elected officials to focus on—the pandemic, jobs, and health care.

When President-elect Biden takes office, the nation's people—including 60 million Latinos—will still be in the midst of multiple crises. COVID-19 continues to sicken and kill at rising and alarming rates, the economic fallout from the uncontained virus is wreaking havoc on the financial security of families, and incidents of flagrant racial injustice continue to outrage the public and fuel widespread civic unrest. Moreover, four years of the toxic anti-Latino and anti-immigrant rhetoric and policies at the core of the Trump administration's politics of division have been woefully counterproductive to government efforts to engage Latinos during the pandemic.

In his campaign, Biden shared his plans to address these crises. He pledged to be a president for all Americans, to work to heal the deep divisions in the United States, and to assemble a cabinet and administration that is diverse and looks like America. He said he would work to control the COVID-19 virus, Latinos' number-one concern when they headed to the polls in November. Acknowledging that the contributions of Latinos are evident “in every part of society,” the president-elect also [committed](#) to an agenda that includes Latinos' other top priorities: access to quality, affordable health care, a fair economic shot at the middle class by increasing jobs and investments in education, and raising wages and improving working conditions.

As the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization, which has built a stronger country by creating opportunities for Latinos for more than 50 years, UnidosUS will hold the incoming president to these campaign promises. Notably, the first steps that the new president takes will be pivotal to his ultimate success. In his first 100 days, it is therefore critical that Biden take quick action to 1) defeat COVID-19 and protect public health; 2) provide economic relief that places our country on the path to a strong and equitable recovery; and 3) work toward racial equity and healing.

* 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. This document may also refer to this population as “Latinx” to represent the diversity of gender identities and expressions that are present in the community.

CRITICAL ACTION NEEDED: 100-DAY PRIORITIES

I. Defeat COVID-19 and Protect Public Health

The federal government's response to the pandemic thus far has been a wholesale failure, with cases and deaths setting daily records. From a Latino perspective, the available data clearly demonstrate that Latinos are more likely to be exposed to, contract, and die from the virus. [As of December 9, 2020](#), Latinos make up more than **24%** of all COVID-19 cases for which race/ethnicity data are available, but only 18% of the total U.S. population.[†] As our [white paper](#), *The Latino Community in the Time of Coronavirus: The Case for a Broad and Inclusive Government Response*, demonstrates, this is due in part to Latinos and immigrant workers being overrepresented in essential jobs, lacking worker protections, having low and decreasing rates of health coverage, and not being able to afford to stop working or self-isolate if exposed. Latinos continue to face growing language and cultural barriers in accessing health services, which further contributes to their vulnerability and health disparities. This public health fiasco must be turned around, immediately.

The incoming administration has pledged to take the following steps to address the public health crisis—consistent with Latino priorities—in the first 100 days of the Biden presidency:

- Assemble a COVID-19 Advisory Board comprising diverse public health experts and scientists to spearhead the pandemic response.
- Establish a COVID-19 Racial and Ethnic Disparities Task Force—like what Kamala Harris proposed in the Senate—to provide recommendations and oversight on disparities in the public health and economic response.
- Ramp up production to replenish the national supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), especially in hard-hit areas that serve disproportionately vulnerable populations.
- Ensure that all Americans have access to regular, reliable, and free COVID-19 testing.
- Provide free, safe, and effective COVID-19 vaccines that are distributed equitably.
- Release and enforce an emergency temporary standard (ETS) to give employers and frontline employees specific, enforceable guidance on how to reduce the spread of COVID-19 in the workplace.
- Direct FEMA to authorize and guarantee full access to disaster relief and emergency assistance for K-12 schools under the Stafford Act to safely reopen schools.
- Call on Congress to pass by the end of January 2021 a COVID-19 health and economic relief package.

[†] This percentage is most likely an undercount. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Race/Ethnicity was only available for 5,715,188 (51%) cases as of December 9, 2020.

These are vital first steps to ensuring that our nation's pandemic response protects and includes Latinos. We applaud the prompt formation of the presidential transition team's COVID-19 Advisory Board. **However, additional steps are needed in the first 100 days of the new administration to meaningfully protect the health of Latinos, and all Americans:**

- ***Provide COVID-19 treatment for all.*** In addition to the above-referenced commitments to ensuring that all Americans have equitable access to free testing and vaccines in the first 100 days, the Biden campaign made a promise to provide everyone in the U.S. with free treatment for COVID-19, regardless of insurance coverage. Access to such treatment is urgently needed and critical to the health and well-being of Latinos and their families. While President-elect Biden has not committed to accomplishing this specific goal within his first 100 days, his administration cannot fully address the disproportionate health impact of the pandemic on racial and ethnic minority families and essential workers without taking this action. Latinos are overrepresented among those sick and dying of COVID-19 while their proportion of the uninsured is rising, estimated at nearly 23% in July 2020. These high and growing rates are due in part to restrictions on public coverage programs and the Affordable Care Act (ACA) Marketplace based on immigration status and loss of employer-sponsored coverage due to layoffs. Therefore, the incoming president should, within the first 100 days, take administrative action to provide access to COVID-19 treatment to everyone, regardless of insurance coverage, ability to pay, or immigration status:
 - Revise emergency Medicaid to cover COVID-19 and associated health problems, which is the most effective means of achieving swift access to screening and treatment for many individuals otherwise blocked by their immigration status.
 - Eliminate federal barriers to Medicaid by empowering states to create a Medicaid-based backstop to other sources of insurance and remove discriminatory barriers and red tape to ensure swift enrollment.
 - Establish a Special Enrollment Period for those purchasing coverage through HealthCare.gov to ensure access to affordable coverage for the uninsured during this crisis.
 - Restore funding for the ACA Navigator program and invest in culturally and linguistically appropriate outreach and education for federal health programs to address high uninsured rates in Latino communities.
- ***Extend emergency nutrition support.*** President-elect Biden's COVID-19 plan calls for a "health crisis food initiative" and to rescind the Trump administration's public charge rule. Food insecurity, which has a profound effect on health, is also on the rise among Latinos, with 47% of Latino households with children reporting trouble accessing food in June 2020. Given the urgency, these steps should be

taken within the first 100 days, and the incoming president should take other steps to extend and expand emergency nutrition assistance:

- Rescind the “SNAP Requirements for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents” Final Rule in its entirety to maintain access to SNAP for hundreds of thousands of recipients.
- Direct the U.S. Department of Agriculture to extend assistance under the pandemic Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program through December 2021 and swiftly approve Puerto Rico’s participation in the program.
- Work with Congress to include in the next COVID-19 relief package a 15% boost to the SNAP maximum benefit and an increase in the minimum monthly SNAP benefit to \$30, as reflected in the “HEROES Act,” to ensure that Latino SNAP participants can put food on the table for the duration of the crisis.

- ***Assess and address the unique needs of Latinos in health care settings.*** We applaud the Biden-Harris commitment to establishing a COVID-19 Racial and Ethnic Disparities Task Force to provide, among other things, recommendations, and oversight on health disparities during the crisis. Carrying out Biden’s pledge to make COVID-19 treatment available to all depends on a health care delivery system that all people trust and can readily access. This requires a plan in the early days of the new administration to help Latinos, immigrants, and individuals of limited English proficiency (LEP) access culturally competent health care, which will require:

- An infusion of funds to support language access services in health care settings, including community-based organizations, to support effective and culturally competent communication between providers and LEP individuals.
- All federal data collection, including data on race and ethnicity, to be made publicly available showing where disparities exist and if they are worsening or improving.
- The participation of community and health leaders in the COVID-19 Racial and Ethnic Disparities Task Force to ensure that actions are culturally responsive.

- ***Dedicate funding to support vulnerable students.*** UnidosUS strongly supports President-elect Biden’s pledge to immediately provide K-12 schools access to disaster relief and emergency assistance so they can safely reopen. Action to address the unique needs of Latino students is also urgently needed, however, considering that one in four K-12 students is Hispanic. The public health crisis and school closures have disrupted the education of millions of Latino students from early childhood through college, threatening further growth of the achievement gap experienced by the most vulnerable students. We therefore call on the Biden-Harris administration to take additional steps in the first 100 days to

meet the needs of Latino students and English learners (ELs) to prevent severe learning loss and close the digital divide impacting these students:

- Immediately call on the Department of Education (ED) to begin data collection on how states and districts have used their CARES Act funds to meet the needs of ELs to ensure accountability to students whose needs have been unmet.
- Call on Congress to pass supplemental funding of \$1 billion for Title III of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to support English learners and, in its FY 2022 budget request, include \$2 billion for Title III and triple Title I funding to support schools with a high percentage of students from low-income families.
- Designate \$6.8 billion for the Federal Communications Commission's E-rate Program to address the fact that one in three Latino families does not have high-speed internet at home, which is necessary to participate in online learning during the pandemic.

II. Provide Economic Relief that Places Our Country on the Path to a Strong and Equitable Recovery

Latinos are in dire economic straits, and millions have been excluded from emergency supports—a vital lifeline for those in crisis. More than half of Latinos have [reported](#) struggling financially, being unable to pay for basic necessities, or having used up all their savings or borrowed money—a substantially greater proportion than the 21% of Whites who reported the same. Since the start of the pandemic, Latinos have fallen behind on monthly rent payments, [with an estimated](#) 10 million Latino children living in a household that is behind on rent and isn't getting enough to eat. The latest employment numbers show that [Latino unemployment](#) remains high at 8.8%, more than double the pre-pandemic average of 4% and nearly 2 percentage points higher than the national rate.

Economic recovery for the nation will be impossible to achieve without addressing the public health crisis and including in recovery efforts the millions of Latinos and other people of color who make up the backbone of the essential workforce. Of course, a fully revived, equitable economy where everyone benefits is not something the president can achieve in his first 100 days in office. Still, a Biden-Harris government can and should put a strong foot forward to create the initial conditions required to stop the pandemic-induced economic freefall and lay the foundation for greater systemic change.

A critical first step is to fully include Latino families in a COVID-19 relief and stimulus package. Like the president-elect and vice president-elect, we strongly support the "HEROES Act," a robust and inclusive relief package that, if passed by the U.S. Senate, would help address vast unmet economic needs of individuals, families, small businesses, and state and local communities. In this and other ways, the Biden administration's economic relief priorities for the first 100 days align with our own:

- Immediately work with Congress to pass a robust, inclusive economic relief package that includes:
 - Aid to state, local, and tribal governments to prevent massive layoffs.
 - Crisis unemployment insurance to help those who have lost jobs make ends meet.
 - Support for Main Street businesses, especially minority-owned businesses that have been left behind by the Cares Act.
 - An extension of the federal government's suspension of monthly payments and interest on student loans as well as student debt cancellation at a minimum of \$10,000.
 - Paid leave for sick workers, workers caring for sick family members, those unable to continue work because of increased risk of health complications due to COVID-19, those caring for children because of school closures, gig workers, and independent contractors.
- Establish a 100-day moratorium on deportations, which will protect essential workers and their families.
- Deliver an immigration bill with a path to citizenship on Day One to Congress, which when passed would stabilize our workforce and economy.

Despite these meritorious promises, the Biden-Harris emergency relief plan must go further to champion vital aid for Latinos and immigrants who have deliberately been left out of economic relief so far:

- ***Include Latino workers and families in emergency economic relief.*** While President-elect Biden supports passage of the “HEROES Act,” which includes expansive stimulus payments, his own plans have not included cash payments. This is a major concern and priority for UnidosUS. Nothing can help support families struggling financially with bills and debt more than direct cash support. Latinos are the most likely to work in jobs hit hard by closures, are the least likely to work from home, and form the backbone of the essential workforce. Yet, millions of Latinos have also been excluded from Economic Impact Payments. In mixed-status families, [the exclusion](#) from these benefits under the CARES Act harms an estimated 3.7 million children and 1.7 million spouses who are either U.S. citizens or green card holders, which needlessly slows our nation's economic recovery. Therefore, the Biden administration must, as part of his pledge in the first 100 days to work with Congress to enact an economic relief package, call on Congress to enact an extension of cash payments to everyone working and paying taxes, regardless of immigration status, so they can pay their bills and help bolster the economy.
- ***Keep more Latinos in their homes.*** During his campaign, Biden promised to make critical investments over the long term so that every American has access to safe and affordable housing by ending redlining and discrimination

in the housing market, providing financial assistance to the housing-insecure, increasing the supply and lowering the costs of housing, and pursuing a plan to end homelessness. President-elect Biden has also proposed to establish a State and Local Emergency Fund that would support federal and state partnerships in providing mortgage and rental relief to families. Prior to the pandemic, Latinos faced challenges with rising housing costs associated with both [homeownership](#) and [rentals](#). Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, job loss has made it even tougher for Latinos to stay in their homes, with [43%](#) of Latinos indicating that they had trouble making rent or mortgage payments. The Biden administration should explicitly lift up housing issues within the first 100 days and harness COVID-19 relief measures and stimulus plans to take action with:

- Robust emergency funding and FY 2022 funding for HUD-approved housing counseling providers to support those facing foreclosure and eviction.
- An extension of mortgage forbearance for up to 12 months for all homeowners.
- A pause on evictions of tenants in rental properties, including those owned by small landlords who should receive a tax credit to help ensure that they can weather the loss of income.

- ***Rescind regulations harming American children in mixed-status households.***

President-elect Biden committed to reversing Trump's public charge rule. We strongly support this action and urge him to swiftly address this and similar policies and practices designed to block low-income, predominantly Latino immigrants from pursuing the public and immigration benefits for which they are eligible. Such policies have led to [deleterious health, education](#), and economic spillover effects on American children—compounded by the COVID-19 health and economic crises. To mitigate these effects, we urge the incoming administration to also rescind, in the first 100 days, regulations such as the U.S. Housing and Urban Development rule on mixed-status households. Where appropriate, new agency guidance should be issued to affirm the eligibility of American children for critical public supports.

- ***Provide student debt relief.*** President-elect Biden has called on Congress to include in its COVID-19 response an immediate cancellation of a minimum of \$10,000 of federal student loan debt. Reducing the amount of debt owed would strengthen struggling borrowers' ability to recover financially, close the racial wealth gap, and serve as an immediate economic stimulus. However, as president, he has the authority to take action without the approval of Congress. The Biden administration should therefore cancel student debt for federal student loan borrowers up to \$10,000 of their total loan balance to ease financial hardship brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ***Stabilize and protect our immigrant and frontline workforce.*** President-elect Biden has made two key Day One immigration-related promises: a 100-day moratorium on deportations to reassess the immigration enforcement regime and the delivery of an immigration reform bill to Congress that provides a pathway to citizenship for the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. We strongly support these campaign promises. The relentless assault of the Trump presidency on immigrant workers and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and Temporary Protected Status (TPS) holders has destabilized our workforce and undermined the stability of our families, communities, and economy. If Congress fails to enact on an immigration plan with a path to citizenship for the undocumented in the first 100 days, we urge the Biden-Harris administration—before the deportation moratorium expires—to expand immigration relief and work permits under the DACA and TPS programs, as well as for other essential workers, until a permanent immigration solution is enacted by Congress.

III. Work toward Racial Equity and Healing

Deep and long-standing fractures in our nation have been laid bare amid multiple crises affecting communities of color, including one too many senseless murders of Black and Brown people at the hands of law enforcement and a pandemic that deepens inequity born from entrenched structural racism in the U.S. The groundswell of support from people of all races and ethnicities throughout the country has focused broad attention on Black and Latino advocates' and communities' demand for racial justice. President-elect Biden has pledged to unify the country, and he cannot do that without an explicit commitment to addressing structural racism and the inequities that stem from it. Moving the nation toward racial equity and healing will require specific Latino-focused efforts.

Regarding racial injustice and equity in the first 100 days, President-elect Biden has committed to:

- Ensuring that political appointees—including his cabinet—and our federal workforce are representative of the country's diversity and "look like America."
- Creating a new post within the White House Council of Economic Advisers to focus on racial equity, including income and wealth gaps.
- Revitalizing the Task Force on New Americans which would prioritize integration—promoting immigrant entrepreneurship, increasing access to language instruction, and promoting civic engagement.
- Instituting a national police oversight commission and providing police departments with tools and resources for reforms to undertake a comprehensive review of their hiring, training, and de-escalation practices.
- Calling on and working with Congress to pass key racial justice and civil rights legislation, including police reform and accountability legislation, the Equality Act to eliminate discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, and a voting rights bill.

UnidosUS strongly supports the above commitments, with the following amendments and additions:

- **Appoint diverse government leaders.** As noted above, the president-elect has committed to ensuring that political appointees and the federal workforce reflect the diversity of America. While Latinos represent 18% of the U.S. population, they make up just 8.9% of the federal civilian workforce—and that representation dwindles to almost nothing when looking at top government positions, including cabinet appointments. In response, UnidosUS and our allies have launched [Proyecto20%](#), a year-long effort to ensure that at least 20% of all federal positions are filled by Latinos. This will result in programs that are more responsive to the needs and concerns of Latinos, inclusion of well-qualified Latinos responding to the call to public service for the good of the American people, and a government that, indeed, looks like the country it represents. To achieve a meaningful and equitable representation of Latinos and Latinas at all levels of government—including in senior positions—we call on the president-elect to make 20% Latino representation in the Biden-Harris government a reality and expect that a proportionate share of nominations/appointments within the first 100 days would reflect that.
- **Collect complete data on racial inequities.** On its transition website, the incoming administration commits to advancing racial equity and details its plan to address the racial wealth gap. Historic disparities exacerbated by the pandemic's disproportionate impact on the Latino community are the result of numerous policy choices that the nation has made over time which have excluded communities of color. The ongoing lack of adequate data collection and reporting of data by race and ethnicity mask the true extent of inequities and interfere with the development of policies needed to affect structural change. The administration should, within the first 100 days, commit White House resources to research and data analyses that document the economic, health, and educational disparities that stem from historic institutionalized racism. Further, the administration should provide and request additional funding in its budget for more robust data collection and disaggregation across all federal departments and programs including health, education, and criminal justice. This information, which must be easily accessible to the public, will help track and uncover inequities, enforce accountability measures, and better target solutions.
- **Begin to unify stakeholders around a community public safety agenda.** We welcome the Biden proposal to establish a national police oversight commission to support reforms and institute accountability in police departments. However, the country also should reevaluate harmful approaches to public safety and the growing footprint of law enforcement in communities of color. Latino men have a 1 in 6 chance of being incarcerated in their lifetime, versus a 1 in 17 chance for White men. These trends are worse for school-aged Latino youth who are 65% more likely to end up in the youth justice system. One-quarter of our nation's children under 18 are Latino, and investments are needed to reverse these trends

for the well-being of our collective future prosperity. We urge the incoming Biden administration to reduce the focus on carceral punishment for nonviolent and petty offenders. The first step, achievable in the first 100 days, is the convening of a national summit that brings together law enforcement, community health experts, community leaders, researchers, and civil rights groups to develop new frameworks for policing and public safety that curtail imprisonment in favor of investments in rehabilitation, drug, and mental health programs that heal communities and keep all Americans safe.

- ***Propose a budget that advances equity, inclusion, and the protection of civil rights.*** While President-elect Biden has pointed to key federal investments that reflect policy priorities, he has yet to unveil an overall budget agenda. As the Biden-Harris transition team ramps up and engages the federal agencies, we anticipate that they will assemble their budget in the weeks ahead. Even in the best of times, structural racism embedded in our national history results in Latinos lagging in economic, education, housing, and health indicators, despite their continued contributions to the nation. The submission in early February 2021 of the president's budget to Congress presents an important opportunity to advance an investment agenda that, first, meaningfully closes racial and ethnic disparities and promotes equity and, second, robustly funds the rooting out of discrimination and racism at the federal agencies. In the first 100 days, the Biden-Harris administration should produce a budget that:

- Includes robust funding of Latino budget priorities, including those enumerated throughout this document, that invest in education, health care, housing, voting, job creation, economic recovery, and strengthening the social safety net.
- Ensures congruence between the Biden administration's stated immigration enforcement policy objectives and the effective and efficient use of taxpayer resources.
- Funds the enforcement across government of federal civil rights laws that provide protection from discrimination in a broad range of areas including those mentioned in the first bullet.
- Grows civil rights office capacity, staff, and resources and supports the resolution of discrimination allegations so that the protection of core civil rights becomes the norm and not the exception.

A single-year budget will not rid our nation of deeply entrenched structural racism, but it will secure more equitable opportunities for Latino families while our nation's leaders embark on the long-term work toward racial justice.

CONCLUSION

In addition to the 100-day promises that President-elect Biden has made, he has released long-term plans to build a better economy, strengthen health care, and tackle structural racism, which are of great interest and concern to Latinos. He has committed to a partial rollback of Trump's tax cuts, which includes raising corporate income taxes from 21% to 28% to fund economic initiatives. If done right, reforms of our tax system should help reduce poverty and inequality, and to do so it must include expansions of the Earned Income Tax Credit and refundable Child Tax Credit. The Biden administration intends to leverage the need for long-term transportation reauthorization to rebuild crumbling infrastructure, create jobs, and address climate change to help fuel a lasting recovery. For highest impact, such investments must prioritize communities where jobs are needed most and the unemployment rates remain stubbornly high, including on the island of Puerto Rico whose people have suffered greatly under abject neglect under the Trump administration. The Biden agenda also includes plans to reverse Trump's immigration policies that separated families, increased inhumane detentions, and closed America's doors to refugees, asylum seekers, those from Muslim-majority countries, and many employment- and family-based immigrants. A fundamental shift in tone and action on these policies is both a moral imperative and an acknowledgment of the role that immigration plays in revitalizing our economy and communities, which is essential to an inclusive, lasting recovery.

Biden's ability to successfully carry out his vision and accomplish his ultimate goals to defeat the pandemic and "build back better" during his first term in office will largely depend on his adeptness to unify the country, put America's best diverse public servants to work for the common good, and, with Vice President-elect Harris, lay a solid and fertile foundation early in their administration for the important long-term work ahead.

At the end of the first 100 days, UnidosUS will evaluate and grade the incoming administration on how well it accomplishes the above policy priorities and meets the needs of Latinos. To weather the public health crisis, Latinos need the tools and resources they do not have today: ready access to free COVID-19 testing, treatment, and vaccines; food to feed their families; culturally sensitive health care services and information in their preferred language; and the resources for their children to keep up in school and stay safe. To contribute to and benefit from our nation's recovery, Latinos need to be fully integrated in the federal government's economic relief programs, including cash to pay bills and meet basic needs; stable housing; respite from Trump's hateful policies that obstruct access to benefits; student loan relief;

and stable employment without the threat of severe illness or deportation. To reduce discrimination and build justice, Latinos need a government that represents them and reflects the diversity of America; complete and accurate data on which to build an equitable recovery; and investments at all levels of government that include them, meet their needs, and hold agencies accountable.

With these first vital steps, a Biden-Harris government in the first 100 days can begin to turn the page on the polarization plaguing our country, meet urgent needs of Latinos who have been ignored by the current administration, and make the vital initial investments crucial to building unity, a healthy nation, and shared prosperity.

About Us

UnidosUS, previously known as NCLR (National Council of La Raza), is the nation's largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization. Through its unique combination of expert research, advocacy, programs, and an [Affiliate Network](#) of nearly 300 community-based organizations across the United States and Puerto Rico, UnidosUS simultaneously challenges the social, economic, and political barriers that affect Latinos at the national and local levels.

For more than 50 years, UnidosUS has united communities and different groups seeking common ground through collaboration, and that share a desire to make our community stronger. For more information on UnidosUS, visit [unidosus.org](https://www.unidosus.org) or follow us on [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [Twitter](#).

