

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



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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.