



Reach Out and Read: *Leyendo Juntos*

Latino Culture Information Sheet

As part of our *Leyendo Juntos (Reading Together)* initiative, Reach Out and Read created this document to provide current and relevant information about Latinos in the United States. The following is based on available research about Latino families as well as the experience of Reach Out and Read medical providers working with Latino families. However, as with any cultural group, it is important to avoid making generalizations or stereotypes about any specific family, based on their ethnicity. There is great diversity among Latinos, and it is important to ask about each family's individual background/strengths/etc. and to address each family's individual needs.

The U.S. Census Bureau classifies Hispanic/Latino as an ethnicity, not a race. Latinos may be of any race. The terms "Hispanic" and "Latino" are often used interchangeably to identify the ethnicity of persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban (and other Caribbean), and Central and South American descent. The term "Latino" may include reference to Brazilian origin and "Hispanic" may include reference to Spanish origin. The term "Latino" is often used to acknowledge African and indigenous influences in Latin America. Each of the 43 Spanish-speaking countries represented by Latinos in the U.S. has its own foods, traditions, cultures, distinctions within Spanish vocabulary, and accents.

There is also great diversity in immigration status, acculturation, education, and socio-economic status.

Population Facts

- According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the estimated Latino population of the United States is 44.3 million as of July 1, 2006, making people of Hispanic origin the nation's largest minority, constituting 15% of the nation's total population (not including the 3.9 million residents of Puerto Rico).
- Latinos are also the fastest-growing minority group in the U.S. The projected Latino population of the United States as of July 1, 2050 is 102.6 million, constituting 24% of the nation's total population by that date.

Immigration

- 70% of Latinos are currently U.S. citizens, either by birth or by naturalization. 89% of Latino children were born in the U.S.
- Immigration patterns vary greatly for new immigrants: migrant workers who follow agricultural cycles, day laborers seeking temporary employment, and families who come seeking new homes/jobs and become part of the community.

Language

- 77% of Latinos in the U.S. speak Spanish fluently, and 62% speak English fluently.
- Reach Out and Read develops and disseminates Spanish language materials for patients, families, providers, clinics, and communities.
- Reach Out and Read medical providers are in a unique position to develop a trusting relationship with families early in a child's life.
- Reach Out and Read medical providers can introduce and emphasize the importance of language, storytelling, and book-sharing to Latino families (in any language).

Cultural Beliefs

- 11% of Latino families report not seeking care because of staff's lack of cultural understanding.

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For more information, contact the Reach Out and Read National Center

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The following cultural values may play an especially important role among Latino families:

Familismo

Familismo, the primacy of the family as a source of support and object of collective loyalty, and high regard for parental roles is a strong value of the Latino population.

Grandmothers and other members of the extended family (e.g. godmother, aunt, etc.) may be important sources of medical and dietary advice. The father may have the ultimate say in some health decisions such as whether or not to vaccinate. Older siblings are expected to help with younger ones. This is frequently the case for reading aloud.

Respeto

Respect for parents and elders is very important in the Latino culture.

Over-familiarity and use of first names may not be appropriate early in a relationship. When speaking in Spanish, it is important to refer to the parents by the formal "*Usted*" instead of the informal "*tu*."

Cariño

A demonstration of affection. *Cariño* is characterized verbally through endearments such as *mijo/a* (my son/daughter), *papito* (little daddy), and *mi amor* (my love).

Simpatia

Importance of pleasantness, politeness, and ability to share in other's feelings, as well as of avoidance of interpersonal conflict.

- Disagreement with a provider may manifest in silence and/or non-compliance.
- Providers who are compassionate, flexible, and friendly will probably learn more about the patient's history and complaints and the patient will be more likely to return in the future.

Fatalismo

The belief that the future is predetermined and that there is little an individual can do to alter his fate.

In addition to the above cultural values, belief in folk illnesses and cures can impact physician-patient interactions. In many cases these beliefs are benign but, if unaddressed, may lead to non-adherence to recommendations, delay in treatment, and bad clinical outcomes (see Flores, Journal of Pediatrics, Jan 2002, p.14-23, for more details).

Some Health Disparity Facts for Latino Children

- Latino children are nearly three times as likely as non-Latino white children to have no usual source of health care.
- 22% of Latino children (compared with 7% of white children) are uninsured.
- Typically, Latino families are less satisfied with their health care.

Some Education Disparity Facts for Latino Families

Latino parents have high educational expectations for their children. One recent study found that 95% of Latino parents believe it is important for their children to attend college. Nevertheless, education disparities still exist among Latinos:

- In 2005, Latino youth were almost four times more likely to drop out of high school than white youth (22% vs. 6%).
- 50% of Latino 4th-graders read below the basic level vs. 22% of whites.
- Latinos are 20% less likely than other groups to be enrolled in early childhood education programs.
- Latino parents are less than half as likely to read daily with their children, as white non-Latino parents.
- Latino families have a little over one-third the number of children's books in their homes as white families.
- By age 2 or 3, Latino toddlers begin to lag behind white middle-class children in vocabulary, listening, and problem-solving skills.

Conclusion

The goal of Reach Out and Read's *Leyendo Juntos* initiative is to develop and disseminate information for providers that will help them better understand their Latino patients so that they can provide them with optimal care. We hope that this information sheet has been useful. Please direct comments/suggestions to stacie.fredriksson@reachoutandread.org.