



# BEYOND THE NUMBERS: LATINX/HISPANIC HERITAGE



There are over 61 million Latinx/Hispanic individuals living in the U.S., and nearly 10 million of those people are living with mental health conditions. But those numbers don't tell the whole story.



## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

A mix of Indigenous and colonial heritage, Latinx/Hispanic cultures vary greatly in regions across the U.S., with Mexicans and Puerto Ricans making up the vast majority of these populations.. While the label of "Latinx and Hispanic" consists of those who are from Latin America or who come from a country that was or is primarily Spanish speaking, not all Latinx individuals are Hispanic, and not all Hispanic individuals are Latinx. For the purposes of this toolkit, these groups will be listed as "Latinx/Hispanic," and specific communities within those identities will be named when relevant. There are more than 20 different countries that make up these groups, all with different cultures, beliefs, and experiences.



Throughout history, many Latinx/Hispanic communities worldwide have faced political unrest, war, and oppression within their countries, often at the hands of U.S. government interventions, such as in Bolivia, Cuba, and Guatemala, to name a few. These eras of oppression led to a large number of internationally displaced persons, a contributing factor of the existing immigration crisis in the U.S. and leading to a high amount of undocumented individuals. Not all Latinx/Hispanic communities crossed borders to get to the U.S. though, with a large number of Mexican Americans predating present-day U.S. territories, including before the U.S. took over much of what once was Mexico. Additionally, Puerto Ricans are U.S. citizens with limited citizenship rights, due to territory not being officially recognized as a U.S. state.



There have been many contributions to U.S. culture by Latinx/Hispanic communities and individuals, specifically food, music, language, and politics. There is no doubt that these communities have made their marks on U.S. society in various ways.



## BARRIERS TO WELL-BEING

From the historical effects of mass genocides and colonization to current day immigration and xenophobia, as well as various inequities across the U.S., those within Latinx/Hispanic communities have had to rise up to be given basic dignity and respect. These experiences have led to cycles of generational trauma that often place the burden of healing onto the most recent generation. Xenophobia in health care, conforming to a different culture, and threats of violence can be major obstacles that prevent individuals from seeking help. These threats can also cause fear in U.S.-born Latinx/Hispanic individuals due to stereotyping and biases. Additionally, systemic oppression in the U.S. has led to challenges around wealth, housing, food, and health care for both those born in the U.S. and those who immigrated here. For undocumented individuals, especially those who do not qualify under the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) relief program, lack of health insurance, work permits, and fear of deportation can cause immense stress and inaccessible support.



One of the biggest challenges that Latinx and Hispanic communities face is access to health care and health education. Despite improvements, language barriers continue to play a major role in the ability for Latinx/Hispanic individuals to find care that is culturally and linguistically responsive, and financially accessible. Mental health concerns may also be difficult to address within this community due to Latinx/Hispanic individuals focusing on physical symptoms rather than the psychiatric ones, or use of idioms of distress that are often misinterpreted, misunderstood, or do not fall within the Western medical models of illness.



## CULTURAL BELIEFS

Mental health and well-being can be a complex topic in many Latinx/Hispanic communities. There is often a need to hide one's struggles in order to appear strong and capable. In doing so, mental health conditions often are hidden. Statements such as "that's just how they are" can hinder the ability to identify and get treatment for mental health conditions. There may be a sense of shame that comes with vulnerability, which creates a mask of strength. Often, Latinx/Hispanic communities view themselves as hardworking and resilient individuals who have overcome immense challenges, which leads them to overlook their need for mental health support.

Latinx/Hispanic communities tend to maintain the following core beliefs:

- **Familismo:** the importance of families
- **Personlismo/Simpatia:** the importance of prioritizing rapport building
- **Respeto:** the importance of respect toward others, especially elders and authority figures
- **Confianza:** the importance of trust, confidence, and mutual reciprocity in a relationship

Many Latinx/Hispanic individuals live in the U.S. as immigrants or descendants of immigrants. They may straddle multiple worlds: one in which they physically live and one in which their family originates. Identity can be complex for children of immigrants and may lead individuals to suffer from feelings of inadequacy and displacement. Furthermore, it can often prevent Latinx/Hispanic individuals from getting the culturally relevant support they need.

## STRENGTHS AND RESILIENCY FACTORS

Diversity within Latinx/Hispanic cultures generates resiliency and strength, especially those who have survived many challenges and learned to thrive for themselves and their loved ones. In addition, these communities have and continue to protect and rely on ancient wisdom and natural resources to maintain health and wellness.

Latinx/Hispanic communities are made up of mostly collectivist cultures. Connection to and understanding of one another is vital to community support and success. For many Latinx/Hispanic individuals, religion is often centered throughout their lives. Churches can serve as ways to connect with loved ones, catch up on social topics, feel supported, and offer hope. For mental health, this factor of hope and faith can be a key anchor that holds an individual or community to their values and expectations.

Furthermore, knowledge of community allows individuals to know where to go for support. Latinx/Hispanic individuals are more likely to seek help for a mental health disorder from a primary care provider than from a mental health specialist. People in Latinx/Hispanic cultures may also seek out community care options, such as traditional healers or prayer circles, or support from their families. The use of traditional and community-based practices of dance, music, food, and celebrations have additionally created spaces in which well-being and emotions are centered. Ultimately, these factors have paved the way for countless Latinx/Hispanic individuals to get mental health care, whatever that looks like for their unique needs.

## CALLS TO ACTION

In order to provide more culturally responsive services to Latinx/Hispanic communities, the following calls to action are proposed:

- **Fund diversified continuing education opportunities about Latinx/Hispanic cultures and recruit Latinx/Hispanic practitioners.**
- **Include community support resources in mental health care that include faith, arts, and family.**
- **Advocate for laws and policies that directly impact Latinx/Hispanic mental health and well-being, including fair wages, affordable housing, immigration support, and other social services.**