Gap Exists Between Health Spending Among Latinos and Whites

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Latinos living in the United States are far less likely to spend on health care and are more likely to spend out of pocket for health costs compared with their white counterparts, according to a study published in the journal *Health Services Research* and reported by University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA) News.

For the study, UCLA teamed up with New York University to examine health expenditure disparities among Latinos and how those disparities change based on length of residency in the United States and their citizenship status.

Using two national data sets—the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) and the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) from the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics—researchers linked consumer information of an individual's health expenditures to information on time of U.S. residence, individual citizenship and immigration status. Combined, the data examined information of 76,000 non-Latino whites and 31,500 Latino adults.

Researchers found that Latinos, both native- and foreign-born, were 68 percent more likely than whites to have no health care spending at all and were 6 percent more likely than whites to spend out of pocket when they did. Overall, Latinos' health spending was only 57 percent of whites.

In addition, researchers found that while over time the disparities between foreign-born naturalized Latinos and whites narrowed, the gap between foreign-born non-citizen Latinos and whites remained constant or declined only slightly.

According to Arturo Vargas Bustamante, PhD, an assistant professor at the UCLA School of Public Health, the disparities could be linked to Latinos' eligibility for public plan coverage, a lack of familiarity with the health care system, and a greater reliance on crossing the border for health services, among other factors.

Bustamante added that these findings highlight the need for health insurance coverage and more consistent sources of care for the Latino population in the United States.

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