

Addressing Barriers to Mental Health Care for Latinos

Mental health experts urge clinics to hire diverse staff that can offer resources in Spanish and help reduce stigma.

July 19, 2024 By Laura Schmidt

According to the [2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health](#), about 20% of Latino adults surveyed reported experiencing a mental illness—defined in the survey as a diagnosed mental, behavioral or emotional disorder that may interfere with one’s life. What’s more, many did not receive treatment for their condition.

What’s worse, [the suicide rate](#) for Latinos in the United States has increased significantly over the last decade. In response, [mental health](#) experts are working to eliminate some of the barriers Latinos face when seeking treatment and support.

Michelle Mata told [The Associated Press](#) (AP) that she grew up in a Latino family that didn’t discuss mental health. As a result, she wasn’t diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder and depression until she was 23.

Today, Mata, 53, works at the San Antonio chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, where she supports others with posttraumatic stress disorder and depression.

Mata and other mental health professionals and community clinics are bringing attention to the lack of mental health experts who are Latino and speak Spanish or other languages. According to the [American Psychological Association](#), only about 8% of psychologists identified as Latino in 2021.

Mental illness affects young people at alarming rates too. In fact, the survey found that 1.2 million Latinos ages 12 to 17 experienced a major depressive episode, yet only half received mental health treatment. Some experts suggest discussing mental health in schools as early as kindergarten to educate and destigmatize mental illness.

“The more we talk about it, and we hear it, and we understand it, we can do something about it,” Mata said. “People don’t understand [that] asking for help is not a sign of weakness. Asking for help is something courageous.”

If you or someone you know needs help, reach out to the [Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) at 988 or the National Alliance on Mental Illness by calling 800-950-6264 or texting “NAMI” to 741741.

To read more, click [#Mental Health](#). There, you’ll find headlines such as “[Rising Suicide Rate Among Hispanics Worries Community Leaders](#),” “[Green Space May Improve Young Children’s Mental Health](#)” and “[Older Women Are Different Than Older Men. Their Health Is Woefully Understudied.](#)”

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