TuSalud

As Latinos Age, Housing, Health and Caregiving Are Top Priorities

By 2060, Latinos will make up 21% of Americans age 65 and older. Who will take care of them?

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New estimates from The Urban Institute suggest that the number of Americans age 65 and older will more than double by 2040; of these, 21% are projected to be elder Latinos, which concerns some health experts.

As longtime UCLA public health researcher David Hayes-Bautista, PhD, explains in a recent report in NBC News, older Latinos already face housing, health and caregiving challenges. Already, the demand for affordable senior living across the country is high, with major cities already struggling to keep up with the number of residents in need. At the same time, U.S. housing costs have skyrocketed over the last two years, a side effect of the COVID-19 pandemic that could leave many Latino elders without a place to call home.

Bautista, director of the Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture at the UCLA School of Medicine, says the physical health of older Latinos is also at risk. Numerous studies show that Latino life expectancy is longer than that of the average American; however, lack of access to health insurance and Social Security threaten the health of many Latinos. (Many Latinos work in agriculture and domestic service, two industries currently exempt from Social Security.)

As a result, many Latinos have lower rates of Medicare coverage, pensions and publicly financed retirement programs than the rest of the aging population. “So how do they get tested, vaccinated and treated when they get ill?” Bautista asks in the report. “All of these things add up.”

Finally, lack of access to affordable housing and good health care can burden those Latino families that have to care for elderly relatives. A report from the National Alliance for Caregiving found that Latino caregivers already tend to be younger (43.4 years) than other caregivers and are far more likely to live with the person they care for, to work full-time while providing care and to report higher levels of financial and physical strain, a phenomenon public health experts fear may be worsening.

To help address this issue, AARP (formerly known as the American Association of Retired Persons) has launched a program in Los Angeles called Ayudando a Quien Ayuda (Helping the Helper) that provides free, personalized support to Latino caregivers. The organization says the program may

expand to other cities.

However, safeguarding the health of Latino seniors will likely require expanding affordable housing and health care initiatives. To learn more about how housing, Medicaid policies and other factors impact the health of communities of color, read “How Social and Structural Racism Drive Health Inequities.”

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