TuSalud

Latinos Face Major Health Risks From Global Climate Change

Studies show rising temperatures and extreme weather are having uneven impacts on the mental and physical health of Latinos.

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When it comes to the health risks associated with global climate change, some communities are disproportionately affected. In fact, a new report in Psychiatric Times argues that Latino communities are facing far worse climate-related emergencies than other populations and is calling on doctors and mental health professionals to help address environmental injustice.

According to the report, while Latino communities across the United States are characterized by many different countries, migration trends and social classes, climate change is increasing health disparities among Latinos of all cultures.

As climate change continues to make extreme weather events more common, vulnerable Latino populations around the world are fleeing their countries as refugees, seeking more stability, better work and shelter.

For example, climate change has had major effects on agriculture across Central and Latin America, where droughts destroy crops, threaten farmers' livelihood and lead to extreme poverty and hunger.

Recent studies also show that for Latinos who immigrate, the risks of climate change are far from mitigated. A recent study from the National Resources Defense Council found that more than half of U.S. Latinos reside in states with the highest levels of climate change risk, such as air pollution, extreme heat and flooding. Latinos also account for 46% of construction laborers and 47.2% of agricultural field workers, putting them at direct risk of rising temperatures and extreme summer heat in many places across the country.

The cumulative effect of migration, health disparities and increased occupational risks on Latino health in the United States has been profound, with further research showing that Latinos receive lower quality health care, suffer worse health outcomes and have higher rates of asthma, cancer, and diabetes than other populations.

What's more, the mental health effects of climate-related threats are also on the rise, with Latino

communities reporting far greater rates of new-onset posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, sleep disorders, attachment disorders and substance use disorder than other racial and ethnic groups.

Moving forward, doctors say it’s important for politicians, health care workers and social services to help prevent and address climate-related threats to Latino health. That includes spreading awareness, providing tools for self-advocacy and supporting local nonprofits seeking to increase public awareness and action around community health risks and access to mental health services.

To learn more about how climate change affects peoples’ health across the United States, see “The Type of Climate You Live in May Increase Your Risk of Cancer.”

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