

Community Solutions to Improve Employed Immigrant Health: Employed Latino Health Initiative Summary

Community Solutions to Improve Employed Immigrant Health: Employed Latino Health Initiative is a two-year \$362,700 grant project funded by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) and the Columbus Medical Association Foundation. The Initiative, which officially launched December 1, 2007, engages members of the Latino community, the local business community and federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) in planning, designing and implementing models that can be utilized by employers and sustained in the community to improve the overall health of employed Latino immigrants.

Over the past several years, Columbus (Franklin County), Ohio has experienced unprecedented growth in its immigrant and refugee populations. Columbus is home to a growing Latino population, which currently comprises 8% of the city's population with over 60,000 individuals living and working in Columbus and surrounding communities. Between 1990 and 2005, Franklin County experienced a 776% increase in births by Latino women.

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Initiative to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities, Latinos have poorer outcomes in diabetes and HIV/AIDS, have more problems with uncontrolled blood pressure and receive fewer childhood and adult immunizations compared with the general population. The most recent Franklin County Profile of Minority Health reveals that Latino adults were more likely to be uninsured than any other racial or ethnic group and were more likely to have gone more than five years without receiving a medical checkup. The report also indicates that a significant number of Latinos were classified as being obese and that Latino adults were more likely than White, Black or Asian adults to be without a usual source of health care.

Focus group discussions among local hotel and restaurant executives revealed that Latino immigrants comprise a growing proportion of their staff and that while employer-sponsored health insurance is available for employees, many Latinos forego coverage due to unaffordable premium costs.

The *Employed Latino Health Initiative* has five key objectives, which are to:

1. Assess the needs of employers and employed Latino immigrants relative to the need for health resources and information, access to health services, and health care coverage;
2. Identify strategies that can improve the health of employed Latino immigrants in order to develop models that attend to those needs;
3. Prioritize and select models to pilot based on affordability, sustainability and ease of implementation;
4. Pilot and evaluate select models to test their utility and effectiveness; and
5. Identify methods for sustaining models as standard community and business practices.

Grant funds will be used to support expert consulting services, project management, evaluation and development of piloted models to be implemented by project partners.

Partners on the Initiative include the Latino Empowerment Outreach Network; Ohio Hotel & Lodging Association; Central Ohio Restaurant Association; Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio; Capital Park Family Health Center; Columbus Neighborhood Health Center; and Lower Lights Christian Health Center. The Initiative also received letters of support from Columbus Public Health and the Columbus City Council's Health, Housing and Human Services and Workforce Development Committee. In addition, the Columbus Medical Association Foundation invested \$60,000 in local funds to support the project.

Project leadership is provided by Jeff Biehl, President of Access HealthColumbus and Alicia D. Smith, Senior Consultant with Health Management Associates, who will serve as Co-Directors of the Initiative. Access Health Columbus is a non-profit organization located in Columbus, Ohio with a mission of ensuring access to health care for vulnerable people in Franklin County. To achieve its mission, AHC works in collaboration with health care, business, government and community leaders to coordinate projects and activities in our community. Health Management Associates is a national health policy research and consulting firm based in Lansing, Michigan with offices throughout the United States, including Columbus, Ohio. The firm specializes in health system restructuring, program development, economics and finance with a special concentration on systems addressing the needs of the medically indigent and underserved.

For more information regarding the project, please contact Jeff Biehl at 614-884-2240 or jbiehl@accesshealthcolumbus.org.

Frequently Asked Questions

Question: Why is the *Employed Latino Health Initiative* necessary?

Answer: Columbus is home to a growing community of immigrants and refugees who often have high rates of chronic health problems. In many cases the health problems are due to difficulties immigrants and refugees have obtaining appropriate social and health services. Working two or more jobs makes it difficult for many immigrants and refugees to attend to the health needs of themselves or family members. This project will seek sustainable and replicable solutions to improve the overall health of employed Latino immigrants. The Initiative will involve employers, Latino community members, advocacy organizations and community health centers working together to prioritize, pilot and evaluate the impact of various health improvement models.

Question: Why will the project focus on the Latino community?

Answer: Latinos represent the largest emerging immigrant population in central Ohio and we believe that this is a good place to start. We expect that models piloted as part of the Initiative will be transferable to additional immigrant and refugee populations as well as to different industries. It is our hope that successful approaches can be modified to determine how best to implement similar strategies for additional populations.

Question: What will be happening over the next two years?

Answer: Over the next several months, project leaders will convene a series of focus group discussions among members of the Latino community, local hotel and restaurant executives and health care providers. Those discussions will further inform the project about the health needs of employed Latino immigrants. Following those discussions, project partners will use the information gathered in order to generate, prioritize and select models to pilot.

Once one or more models are selected to pilot, the model(s) will be implemented by project partners in collaboration with local hotels and restaurants. Evaluation criteria will be developed in order to determine the impact that selected models have on improving the health of employed Latino immigrants. To the extent successful models are identified, project partners will identify methods to sustain and replicate models as standard community and business practices.

Question: What type of models will be piloted?

Answer: Based on feedback from Latino community members and discussions with local hotels and restaurant executives, we identified three areas of need: (1) awareness of health resources and information, (2) access to health care services and (3) health care coverage. Piloted models could potentially involve one or multiple strategies.

During the project planning phase, one human resource director expressed frustration about not being aware of a bilingual health services directory that could have been made available to several pregnant and uninsured women who needed access to free prenatal services. This is one example of a health resource that could be made widely available to local hotels and restaurants for distribution to staff.

Employers also acknowledged that many immigrant employees work multiple jobs or lack transportation, which makes it difficult to receive health services during hours that traditional primary care settings are open. A potential health access strategy could involve the delivery of worksite-based health care or screenings for benefits eligibility such as Medicaid and child care assistance.

The cost of health insurance coverage compared with a worker's wage was cited as the primary reason participation rates in employer-sponsored health benefits among immigrant employees is so low. A possible health coverage strategy to be piloted could involve the development of affordable health plan benefits that optimize the role of community health centers as medical homes or premium subsidy programs supported by employer, employee and public funds.

Question: How will pilot models be selected?

Answer: During the first several months of the Initiative, project leaders will be meeting with local hotels and restaurants, their Latino immigrant staff members and local health care providers in order to understand what is needed to improve the health of employed Latino immigrants. Needs identified through those discussions will be used to generate, prioritize and select models to pilot.

Question: Who does the *Employed Latino Health Initiative* benefit?

Answer: The *Initiative* has both direct and indirect beneficiaries. Employed Latino immigrants directly benefit because they can receive health resources, access health services or participate in health care coverage plans. Latino immigrants also benefit because they can continue pursuing personal and economic goals while attending to their own health needs. Employers directly benefit in that they can retain a healthy and vital workforce. The community also benefits. Through the development of models to improve overall health, it is our hope that fewer individuals access health care inappropriately (i.e., through use emergency rooms), and that more individuals have access to the health care resources they need.

Question: Will Latino community members be directly involved in the project?

Answer: Yes. The Latino Empowerment Outreach Network (LEON) is a very important partner in the project. LEON will assist with outreach to the Latino community by hosting focus group discussions and will also assist with the development of pilot models.

Question: Will grant funds be used to pay for health care services or to purchase health insurance?

Answer: No. Grant funds will be used to support expert consulting services, project management, evaluation and development of piloted models to be implemented by project partners.

Question: How do I learn more about *Employed Latino Health Initiative*?

Answer: Please contact Jeff Biehl at 614-884-2240 or by e-mail at jbiehl@accesshealthcolumbus.org. Information about the project is also available at www.accesshealthcolumbus.org.