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The First Year of Latino COVID-19 Deaths: Why Should Anyone Care?

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During its first year, the coronavirus has ravaged Latino families and communities in California and other states far more seriously than it has non-Latino populations.

How much worse? For example, Latinos make up 39.3% of California's population (15.5 million people), yet they constitute a far larger percentage (48.5%) of all COVID-19–related deaths in the state. In contrast, non-Hispanic whites make up 36.6% of California's population (14.5 million people), but have accounted for only 30.4% of all the state's COVID-19 deaths.

“Farm workers, meatpacking workers, grocery store clerks, and nursing home attendants are also essential workers,” said Dr. Paul Hsu, an epidemiologist at the UCLA School of Public Health. “But as they worked shoulder to shoulder in the fields or checked out customers' shopping carts, they were not provided personal protective gear until late in the pandemic. With more exposure to the coronavirus, coupled with less access to care, Latino essential workers have had higher case rates, and now have higher death rates.”

Yet some might ask: Why should anyone care that more Latinos have died from COVID-19–related causes than non-Hispanic whites have?

The U.S. Latino Gross Domestic Product

Anyone who is interested in restoring the United States Gross Domestic Product's (GDP) growth rate to healthy levels should care deeply about the threat that COVID-19 poses to the fastest-growing segment of the nation's economy: the U.S. Latino Gross Domestic Product.

By 2018, the 60 million Latinos living in the U.S. had created the equivalent of the world's eighth-largest GDP: \$2.6 trillion in size, larger than the GDPs of Italy, Brazil, South Korea, or Russia. The U.S. Latino GDP ranks comfortably in the top ten GDPs of the world.

This U.S. Latino GDP has been growing impressively for nearly a decade. From 2010 to 2018, the U.S. Latino GDP had an annual growth rate of 3.3%, while the non-Latino portion of the U.S. GDP had a weaker growth rate, at 2.1%

“It comes as a surprise to many that the 60 million Latinos in the U.S. have created the eighth-largest economy in the world,” said Dr. David E. Hayes-Bautista, professor of

medicine at the UCLA David Geffen School of Medicine. “What is more surprising is that the U.S. Latino GDP has been growing nearly 60% faster than the overall U.S. GDP since 2010. The U.S. Latino GDP is the brightest spot in the nation’s economy.”

COVID-19 Attacks the U.S. Latino GDP

Hard work, strong families, self-sufficiency, business friendliness, healthy behaviors, patriotism: these values drove Latino adults during the 1990s and early 2000s to lay the foundations of what became the world’s eighth-largest economy by 2018.

“The strong Latino work ethic is seen in the fact that Latino households have more wage-earners than non-Hispanic white households,” said Hayes-Bautista. “However, when they have to work more exposed to the coronavirus than white-collar workers, when they are paid very little for their hard work, when they are less likely to be offered health insurance, when they are less likely to find a doctor who can speak Spanish, it is no wonder that working-age Latinos have higher case rates and death rates than the general population.”

Why Everyone Should Care about Latino COVID-19–Related Deaths

When the U.S. economy is growing rapidly, nearly everyone benefits. But when the economic growth rate is anemic—or even worse, negative—nearly everyone suffers. The U.S. Latino GDP is currently the most productive sector for a strong overall U.S. GDP growth. Because COVID-19 is disproportionately killing Latino workers in their most productive years, everyone should care about COVID-19’s effects on the Latino population.

“The U.S. Latino GDP has the potential to power the nation’s economy out of the pandemic. But every working-age Latino who dies due to COVID-19 is one less contributor to the country’s economic future,” concluded Hayes-Bautista.

Latino COVID-19 deaths are not merely a “Latino issue.” They are every American’s issue.

Methods

Data on COVID-19 deaths, stratified by race/ethnicity and by age group, were furnished by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH). As of November 29, 2020, out of 19,220 total deaths, 173 (1%) were missing racial/ethnic information and therefore were excluded from this analysis. Population denominators to calculate the rate of cases per 100,000 were tabulated from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS).

About CESLAC. Since 1992, the Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture (CESLAC) of the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA has provided cutting-edge, fact-based research, education, and public information about Latinos, their health, their history, and their roles in California’s society and economy.

For more information, or to arrange a telephone interview with the Center’s Director, David E. Hayes-Bautista, Ph.D., Distinguished Professor of Medicine, please contact Adriana Valdez, at (310) 794-0663 or cesla@ucla.edu.