

Center for the Study of Latino Health
and Culture
Suite 200-Q
924 Westwood Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90024
uclahealth.org/ceslac

For Immediate Release

October 22, 2020

Contact:

Adriana Valdez, (310) 794-0663, cesla@ucla.edu

COVID-19: Who Can Afford to Pay the Costs of Care?

Los Angeles, California— Report no. 10 of UCLA's Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture (CESLAC).

California employs an estimated 800,000 farm workers, who earn an average annual income of less than \$18,000. Due to the nature of their work, farm workers labor shoulder to shoulder, often without any personal protective equipment (PPE). If a farm worker becomes infected with COVID-19, the cost of a course of remdesivir treatment (\$3,120) amounts to more than two whole months' income for them. Because they rarely have health insurance, in order to pay for such a course of treatment, a California farm worker would have to go entirely without meals, housing, and transportation for two months (60 days). Otherwise, that farm worker would be placed under a great financial burden by this crippling medical debt, which could trap their family in poverty.

"Agriculture and film are two of the top industries in California," said David E. Hayes-Bautista, Distinguished Professor of Medicine and Director of the Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture at UCLA. "While the public follows the travails of Hollywood stars dealing with COVID-19, their farm worker counterparts in the state's economy labor in anonymous poverty, often without health insurance and with extremely limited access to care. They are important to few of us—that is, until we can't find our favorite food product in the supermarket. We need to protect farm workers, the unsung backbone of California's economy, whose efforts feed each and every one of us."

Their work in supplying California's food and in other essential jobs must be supported. They need to have adequate access to PPE, testing, and public health education, as well as to affordable health care services, regardless of their citizenship status.

"Though additional testing is needed on the efficacy of drugs such as Remdesivir, meant to help COVID-19 patients, such drugs are often not financially accessible to many, especially uninsured low-income populations," said Paul Hsu, an epidemiologist with the Fielding School of Public Health at UCLA.

Nearly 50 years ago, the medical economist Victor Fuchs posed a question in the title of his first book on health, economics, and social choice: *Who shall live?* In the face of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on essential workers—such as farm workers—who earn little and rarely have health insurance, we must ask ourselves the same question: Who shall live?

About CESLAC.

Since 1992, UCLA Health's Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture (CESLAC) 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.