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COVID-19– Associated Deaths in Working-Age Latino Adults

Los Angeles, California—Report No.8 of UCLA’s Center for the Study of Latino Health and Culture (CESLAC) addresses the increase in death rates of working-age Latino adults. These COVID-19–associated deaths are burning their way through the entire Latino working-age population. Over the three months from May 11 to August 11, 2020, there was a nearly five-fold increase in death rates in all three age groups: young adult, early middle age, and late middle age.

“In the early days of the pandemic, we worried about the skyrocketing death rate for the elderly,” explained David E. Hayes-Bautista, lead author of the report and Distinguished Professor of Medicine at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. “Now the virus is falling on the working-age population, and the young Latino population is disproportionately represented in this demographic.”

Latino Young Adult (ages 18–34). Young adult Latinos include college students and recent graduates beginning their lifetime labor force participation. While the absolute number of deaths in this group—and hence also their death rate—was very low, its rate of growth is nonetheless alarming. In the three months from May 11 to August 11, the death rate for this group increased by 473%.

“These are uncertain times for young adults,” said Giselle Hernandez, a research assistant at CESLAC. “What should be exciting formative years is now marred by the fear of contracting COVID-19 or being an asymptomatic carrier and unwittingly passing it on to loved ones and contributing to health complications for them and their families.”

Latino Early Middle Age (ages 35–49). Early middle-aged Latinos are consolidating their place in the labor force and are in the process of forming families and households. During the three months between May and August, the death rate in this age group grew just as alarmingly, by 386%.

Latino Late Middle Age (ages 50–69). Late middle-aged Latinos, like most late middle-aged persons, are in their peak earning years. Death rates were far higher for this age group to start with, and during the same three-month period they grew by 471%.

The death rate is highest for late middle-aged Latinos. At 54.73 deaths per 100,000, it is nearly 25 times higher than the young adult rate (2.12), and nearly four times higher than the early middle-aged rate (14.23). COVID-19 is taking a high toll on Latino adults in their peak earning years.

As the coronavirus works its deadly way into every nook and cranny of California's population, its victims' profiles become clearer and clearer: they are the unsung essential workers. Different from the high-profile essential workers such as physicians, nurses, first responders, etc., the unsung essential workers are farm workers who feed California, truck drivers who transport the state's goods, meat and vegetable packers, the grocery industry's shelf stockers and checkout clerks, construction workers, automobile mechanics, gardeners and landscapers, bus drivers, office cleaners, nursing home attendants, and others who toil day and night to keep California functioning.

"Anything that threatens the stability of our economy, like COVID-19's inroads into the working-age population, needs to be taken seriously," concluded Hayes-Bautista.

Methods. Data on COVID-19 deaths, stratified by race/ethnicity and by age group, were furnished by the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) between May 11 and August 11, 2020. Population denominators to calculate the age-specific death rate per 100,000 were tabulated from the 2018 American Community Survey (ACS), the latest available.

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.