



CALIFORNIA NETWORK OF MENTAL HEALTH CLIENTS

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Mental Health and Self-Help: An Informational Resource for Latino Clients

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To advocate for the mental health needs of Latinos in California, the California Network of Mental Health Clients presents this introductory self-help resource that includes information about advocacy and cultural competence, along with strategies for improving mental health services and reducing stigma. It also includes two appendices: one on resources available in Spanish, and one on evidence-based practices, including many that have been researched for effectiveness with Latinos. This paper is intended to be a resource to Latino clients as well as to support client-run self help programs in becoming culturally competent and therefore more accessible to Latino clients.

A critical part of the mission of the California Network of Mental Health Clients is to improve the health and promote the well-being of Latino¹ populations in California. Latino stakeholders and other Californians are united by the following aims:

- Advocating for improved, recovery-based, consumer-driven mental health care for all Latino clients and their families
- Promoting culturally and linguistically competent mental health practices appropriate for and accessible to Latino populations
- Advancing strategies, particularly those involving service provision, to improve the mental health and well-being of Latino clients
- Supporting education within Latino and other communities to reduce mental health related stigma.¹

This paper will discuss each of these goals and provide information about how you as Latino clients and their advocates can achieve them.

Advocacy: How Can You Improve Decision- and Policy-Making in Regard to Latino Mental Health?

Although it may seem less than critical, you should consider including advocacy in your personal self-help program. The unfortunate truth is that without changes in the structure and policies of the mental health system, the recovery of many Latino clients will be at risk. Advocacy for Latino clients targets structural obstacles, that is, problems in the way the mental health system is designed and operated, and mental health policies that contribute to inequality. This inequality is primarily related to access to and use of appropriate services and supports. Structural obstacles include the lack of services and resources

¹ The word “Latino” can be defined as “Hispanic American,” and it refers to ethnicity. It can apply to a person of any race. Latino subcultures are widely diverse. They include Mexican American, Cuban American, Puerto Rican, and many other groups

² This information has been synthesized and adapted from the California Mental Health Association’s website: <http://calma.org/>.

provided in the primary language of Latino mental health clients, and the need for expanded resources, including mental health facilities, in communities populated largely by Latinos. Policy barriers include the lack of Latino representation in policy making groups, the need for policy documents and statements that are written and recorded in the primary language of Latino groups, and the shortage of research addressed at issues specific to Latino communities.

You should be aware that the mental health and well being of Latino populations in California has not received a level of attention equal to other groups. Frequently, mental health issues create high levels of stress for an enormous number of families. The inability of many Latino families to access mental health insurance and care puts them at a devastating disadvantage in relation to their stability.² In particular, mental health care inequities result in the need for crisis treatment, which costs the public far more than preventative and maintenance treatment. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), in its health plan Healthy People 2010, has set two goals: 1) to increase the quality and length of a mentally and physically healthy life for all Americans, and 2) to eliminate mental health inequality by the year 2010.³ These goals, while set for the nation as a whole, are of primary importance in California.

As clients and advocates, you can improve your understanding of how the consequences of inequality are dire for Latinos and their families. This fact alone should persuade policy makers and others to address the need for change. However, every citizen of California has a stake in improving the mental health and well-being of Latinos because the result of not doing so is negative for everyone. According to the 2000 census, Latinos will constitute about half of California's population in 2010. Thus, addressing the needs of mental health clients within this group must be of the highest priority. Latinos play a critical role in the economic stability and growth in the state.

Your advocacy efforts can be founded on an informed understanding of various community and organizational responses to Latino mental health care needs. Without question, these responses must be guided by the voices of Latino clients regarding the barriers they have faced in accessing appropriate services: no one else can speak with authority about your experiences. When mental health clients and their advocates clearly understand their own objectives, they are better able to make their voices heard among policymakers and others who can effect change. Consistency between the message you present and that presented by other clients will vastly improve the likelihood of swift and effective change, so you are encouraged to become part of advocacy movements and networks within your community and at the state level. At the state level, you can work with such advocacy groups as the California Network of Mental Health Clients,⁴ which can direct you to local organizations, such as chapters of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, in your community.

At the same time, you need to be able to speak up for self-driven services, along with consumer-driven services in general. The primary characteristic of consumer-driven services is that clients take the primary decision-making role in relation to their own care. In addition, the client voice must be central to larger decisions made at the local, state, and national levels, and it should be represented at all levels of service delivery, from individual care plans to national research efforts. According to the Center for Mental Health Services Subcommittee on Client Issues, "This includes the policies and procedures governing systems of care, choosing supports, services, and providers; setting goals; designing and implementing programs; monitoring outcomes; and determining the effectiveness of all efforts to promote mental health

² The statistics and projections here are taken from California's 2000 Census:
<http://www.census.gov/census2000/states/ca.html>.

³ Healthy People 2010 includes objectives to be achieved during this decade. It is intended to assist mental health agencies develop programs that improve the well being of all individuals with serious mental health conditions.

⁴ The California Network of Mental Health Clients, which is the entity sponsoring this paper, is part of the national Consumer Network. It's website, which provides contact information for individuals who can answer your specific questions, follows:
<http://www.californiaclients.org/>.

and wellness.”⁵ You have a right to consumer-driven services, and all Latino clients can benefit from your advocacy on your own and their behalf.

Latinos, like most other Californians, are generally unaware of mental health care inequality. This lack of awareness allows legislators and other policy makers to make short-sighted decisions that ignore Latino health care needs. Education and media strategies aimed at informing the general public about the health care needs of Latinos must be implemented on an ongoing basis. One-time awareness efforts at schools or through the media can be expected to have little impact on changing public policy and reducing inequality. Because the impact of self-advocacy efforts has not been well assessed, research and evaluation must be conducted to determine their effectiveness, as well. Without public awareness of the needs of Latino clients, legislators, policy makers and other community leaders are unlikely to support ongoing programs that are intended to remove barriers in the system.

Particular attention must be given to assessing the stigma in Latino communities toward seeking and receiving mental health care. According to the Latino Health Advocates Founders Summit, “Conducting periodic assessments is an important step in developing a program of communication and action that promotes public understanding of the issues and generates appropriate levels of support.” Community assessments might include local and area demographics, the make-up of service systems, the satisfaction of Latino clients, primary language competence, knowledge among staff and administrators of Latino cultures, and the severity of stigma. As a client or advocate, you can best advocate for yourself and others by being aware of and supporting research about Latino mental health, along with education about mental health issues, including stigma.

Cultural Competence: What Can You Do to Ensure that Mental Health Services Are Appropriate and Accessible?

The incorporation of cultural competence is a central part of the mission of CNMHC, and promoting Latino self-help strategies is a major organizational goal. The integration of cultural competence in client organizations and service system agencies is a big challenge. Rather than being something that agencies and systems can add on to their programs, cultural competence involves an underlying set of values that provides the foundation for all policies and practices. As a Latino mental health client or advocate, you can promote cultural competence by finding ways to be inclusive, and by communicating and collaborating with other Latino clients and their advocates, as well as with the organizations, agencies, and systems that serve them.

In each case in which cultural distinctions are made there is likely to be a degree of privilege or disadvantage associated with the difference. For example, males are often considered to be more privileged than females, and Latinos are, in many circumstances, likely to be less privileged than whites. This kind of bias has resulted in inequality in the availability, accessibility, and quality of mental health services intended for individuals from every cultural group. Along with ethnicity, the term “culture” takes into account race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, socioeconomic status, language, geography, and disabilities, as well as the “culture of mental illness” and the culture of the individual family.

Cultural competence is characterized by the principles of increasing access to and use of services, encouraging consumer-driven care planning, and ensuring that all clients are given dignity, respect, and understanding. Following is a description of the general aspects of cultural competence that are fundamental to CNMHC’s vision and mission:

- Increasing access to and use of appropriate and quality mental health services and supports for all clients;

⁵ This quotation comes from the website of the Center for Mental Health Services National Advisory Council’s Subcommittee on Client/Survivor Issues: http://download.ncadi.samhsa.gov/ken/msword/Final_Consumer_Driven_1-8-2007.doc

- Promoting the right and ability of all clients to consumer-driven services, that is, to direct their own mental health care
- Promoting the availability of services and supports in the primary language of clients to increase their access and use of services and to enable them to direct their own mental health care
- Ensuring that all clients are treated with dignity, respect, and understanding

Culture makes a difference in the way people live. While celebrating the positive aspects of cultural diversity is important, it is even more critical to promote understanding of the ways in which biases based on cultural differences can result in advantages (“privilege”) being awarded to some individuals and groups while disadvantaging others.

Strategies: What Concrete Actions Can You Take to Improve Latino Mental Health?

The sections above have emphasized principles, values, and beliefs. However, the following sections are intended to focus on strategies you can use to improve the well being of Latino clients and communities. Once clients, mental health professionals, client organization staff, and others are aware of inequality and discrimination, you can encourage them to act in ways that improve the lives of Latino clients. Some strategies follow:

- Help to ensure the availability of resources presented in the primary language of Latino clients by speaking out when these resources are not available and praising those who provide them. The provision of these resources may include, for example:
 - The translation of written materials for clients
 - The availability of interpreters for those who need them
- Work to increase the diversity of all groups and systems that serve Latinos to include Spanish-speaking clients and others fluent in Spanish
- Build collaborative partnerships with other clients, client groups, and organizations that serve Latino clients to achieve goals you share
- Let service providers know you expect them to have knowledge about Latino cultures and skills to improve their interaction with Latino clients
- Help Latino clients find individuals who can intervene on their behalf when they are not receiving needed services
- Make sure that administrators understand they must include client input in the planning, provision, and evaluation of services

In some ways client organizations, such as CNMHC, are ideally suited to the application of the steps described above. Your involvement in CNMHC’s activities and programs can go a long way toward improving your ability to make change happen. All clients will encounter situations with professionals and others in mental health, social services, and other agencies that challenge them and force them to explore their individual cultural expectations. Latino clients who continually evaluate their own perspectives and opinions will encourage others to do the same.

A final, critical skill area for Latino clients and their advocates is the ability to move toward concrete goals without creating adversarial relationships. Creating conditions so that clients can have their needs met requires maintaining working relationships with others. Because successful Latino clients have better access within the system, good working relationships with others, and experience navigating and helping others to navigate, they can smooth the road for other clients who are entirely new to the system.

Stigma: How Can You Improve Attitudes Among Latinos About Serious Mental Health Conditions?

The majority of Americans with diagnosable mental health disorders do not receive treatment. The number of Latinos who lack treatment is even higher than the national average. This occurs, in large part, because of the stigma surrounding mental illness, which can be an especially powerful barrier in Latino communities. Latinos have a disproportionately high prevalence of serious mental health conditions and are at increased risk for suicide,⁶ and some research suggests that Latino communities may also harbor increased prejudice and discrimination against those with serious mental health conditions. Clients within these communities may feel shame and guilt about their mental health; they may be blamed by others; and they may fear the loss of a job or other negative consequences if others know about their diagnoses and treatment.

Responding to stigma involves telling people the truth about mental illness. Four basic truths about mental health are presented in *Culture, Race, and Ethnicity, A Supplement to Mental Health: The Surgeon General's Report*:⁷

1. Mental health is fundamental to health.
2. Mental illnesses are real health conditions.
3. The efficacy of mental health treatments is well documented.
4. A range of treatments exists for most mental disorders.

Understanding these truths and helping others to understand them is a key component in reducing the stigma of mental illness among Latinos. While stigma may stem from misunderstanding, it cannot be eliminated by simply presenting facts. Those who stigmatize the mentally ill can benefit a great deal from personal contact with individuals who have mental health diagnoses. The one-to-one contact that can take place in primary and secondary school classrooms, colleges and universities, professional education programs, and other Latino community settings may be the best weapon against stigma. In addition, movies, television shows, and advertising campaigns (available in both English and Spanish) can be powerful in combating the stereotypical beliefs, negative attitudes, and destructive behaviors associated with mental health stigma. You can battle stigma on a personal level by helping others you encounter understand the truth about serious mental health conditions; you can also join the fight by supporting programs that battle stigma.

Conclusion: Where Can You Find Other Self Help Tools and Strategies for Latino Clients?

One of the agencies that supports the California Network of Mental Health Clients is the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), which falls under the umbrella of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The acronym SAMHSA can serve as an excellent key word in searching for information about resources for Latino clients. You can also find information and resources from the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI) and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), as well as local NAMI organizations and the state nonprofit called the California Institute of Mental Health. Many of the resources from these organizations and agencies have been translated into Spanish, and the websites include reference tools to find information in translation. You can use the independent search tools of the website and the keywords “Latino,” “translation,” and “Spanish” to find them. In addition, two appendices follow this document. The first presents a number of publications for Latino clients who speak Spanish as their primary language. The second lists several evidence-based practices for Latinos; these practices have been researched using Latino subjects and their effectiveness has been indicated. While the State of California and the nation will be working toward equality in mental health services for many years to come, you can do a great deal to help yourself and other Latino mental health clients by

⁶ See *Mental Health 2004* and the fact sheets on suicide from the website of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/mentalhealth/> and <http://www.cdc.gov/ncipc/dvp/suicide/>.

⁷ The Supplement can be accessed at the following website: <http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/library/mentalhealth/cre/sma-01-3613.pdf>.

becoming educated about advocacy, cultural competence, strategies for improving care, and stigma, as well as self help tools that are available now.

Translation of this paper into Spanish is currently underway.

Appendix A: Spanish-Language Publications and Resources from SAMHSA

Following are several Spanish-Language resources. They come from the following website, from which many more can be accessed:

http://search2.samhsa.gov/search?q=Spanish&sort=date%3AD%3AL%3Ad1&output=xml_no_dtd&ie=UTF-8&oe=UTF-8&client=KAP&proxystylesheet=KAP&site=KAP&btnG.x=36&btnG.y=8

[PDF] [1125-680 KAP Men Spanish.qxp](#)

Page 1. Una Guía para Hombres en Recuperación para Ayudarles a Enfrentar los Problemas Asociados con el Abuso Infantil US DEPARTMENT ...

www.kap.samhsa.gov/products/brochures/pdfs/HelpingHeal-Mens-spanish.pdf - 2005-01-20 - [Text Version](#)

[KAP ::: Multi-Language Initiative \(MLI\)](#)

... Drogas, Alcohol y el VIH/SIDA: Una Guía Para Su Salud This 2-page color brochure for **Spanish**-speaking clients explains the increased risk of HIV transmission ...

www.kap.samhsa.gov/mli/ - 78k - 2008-01-23 - [Cached](#)

[PDF] [¿Qué es el Tratamiento](#)

Page 1. Page 2. Agradecimientos Este folleto fue producido por Johnson, Bassin & Shaw, Inc., bajo el Contrato No. 270-04-7049 con ...

www.kap.samhsa.gov/mli/docs/spanish/WhatIsTx-Spanish.pdf - 2004-11-05 - [Text Version](#)

[KAP ::: Brochures & Periodicals ::: Consumer Products](#)

... recovery. The tone and content aim to allay patient anxieties and to offer hope. English and **Spanish** language versions available. ...

www.kap.samhsa.gov/products/brochures/consumer/ - 52k - 2008-01-24 - [Cached](#)

[PDF] [MODULE 10: Integrating Motivational Approaches Into Practice](#)

... SAMHSA's NCADI offers thousands of publications (most of them are free) and runs a 24-hour helpline (English and **Spanish**) for SAMHSA. ...

www.kap.samhsa.gov/products/manuals/tipcurriculum/pdf/pmodule10.pdf - 2006-07-24 - [Text Version](#)

[MS WORD] [Substance Abuse Relapse Prevention](#)

... Contains the **Spanish**-language version of Aging, Medicines and Alcohol. ... Contains the **Spanish**-language version of Good Mental Health is Ageless. ...

www.kap.samhsa.gov/products/manuals/text/substanceabuserelapse.doc - 2005-10-25 - [Text Version](#)

[PDF] [Older Adults Manual 0021-410 - Frontmatter.qxp](#)

... Contains the **Spanish**-language version of Aging, Medicines and Alcohol. ... Contains the **Spanish**-language version of Good Mental Health is Ageless. ...

www.kap.samhsa.gov/products/manuals/pdfs/substanceabuserelapse.pdf

Appendix B: Evidence Based Practice Databases

Below are three databases that reference evidence based practices, including practices that have been researched with Latino populations and have been indicated to be effective. These listings have been adapted from the following website:

http://www.samhsa.gov/Campaigns_programs/campaigns_alpha.aspx.



[Access to Recovery](#)

ATR is a presidential initiative which provides vouchers to clients for purchase of substance abuse clinical treatment and recovery support services. The goals of the program are to expand capacity, support client choice, and increase the array of faith-based and community based providers for clinical treatment and recovery support services.



[Mental Health Services Locator](#)

A searchable directory of mental health treatment facilities and support services.



[National Registry of Evidence-based Programs & Practices](#)

NREPP is a searchable database of interventions for the prevention and treatment of mental and substance use disorders.
