

Access to Affordable Healthcare for the Latino Community in Georgia

Introduction

Latino residents in Georgia face persistent and overwhelming barriers to accessing healthcare, reflected in high uninsured rates and limited access to preventive services for maternal and pediatric patients, as well as prescriptions like PrEP and PEP. Approximately 30.4% of Latinos (and half of Latinas) in the state are uninsured—nearly double the national average for Latinos—leaving thousands without coverage for essential services.¹

The 2023 *Status of Latino Health in Georgia* details immense disparities in access to quality and culturally competent healthcare. These disparities are exacerbated for individuals who are undocumented, in mixed-status families, low-income, living with disabilities, not English-proficient, and those from the LGBTQ community.¹

Part of the solution to addressing this gap includes Medicaid expansion in Georgia, increased access to insurance, culturally appropriate clinicians, expansion of licensing, incentives and opportunities for those interested in health-related careers, and other related efforts aimed at reducing barriers—including drivers' licenses for all, healthy and safe housing, and equitable HIV prevention and treatment access.

Current Healthcare Policies and Gaps

- **Medicaid Expansion:** Georgia has not adopted Medicaid expansion under the ACA, leaving approximately 1.9 million low-income individuals—including many Latinos—in the “coverage gap.”²
- **Impact of Anti-Immigrant Legislation:** Many individuals miss medical appointments or delay seeking care because they cannot drive without a license. Additionally, Latinos often fear completing Medicaid application forms that require information about their family's immigration status, especially amid threats of public charge consequences and data-sharing agreements.¹
- **Children's Coverage:** While PeachCare for Kids and Medicaid assist children, Latino children remain underinsured—uninsured at 16.4%, more than twice the rate of other groups.³
- **HIV Prevention (PrEP/PEP):** Despite CDC recommendations, PrEP and PEP are underutilized by Latino communities due to lack of awareness, provider stigma, cost, and transportation barriers. A Georgia DPH report highlights rapid HIV transmission clusters among Latino MSM.⁴

Impact on the Latino Community in Georgia

1. Uninsured and Coverage Gaps

Latinos in Georgia report a 30.4% uninsured rate—nearly double the national average—exacerbating vulnerability to disease and financial strain. Children fare better but still lag: Latino children are uninsured at 16.4%, versus 7.2% for non-Latinos.¹

2. Maternal and Pediatric Health Disparities

Coverage gaps worsen maternal and child health risks. Many Latina mothers face higher rates of late or no prenatal care and adverse birth outcomes.⁵ In 2022, 11.4% of live births to Hispanic mothers in Georgia received late or no prenatal care, compared to 7.6% for non-Hispanic mothers.¹

3. HIV Prevention Access

PrEP/PEP uptake among Latino Georgians is hindered by low provider engagement and systemic barriers. CDC data show that Hispanic persons are less likely than white peers to discuss or receive referrals for PrEP.⁶ Georgia-specific data indicate that Latino MSM experienced increased HIV diagnoses while prevention access lagged. States with Medicaid expansion double PrEP usage compared to non-expansion states like Georgia.⁷

4. Structural and Cultural Barriers

Language, immigration status, cost concerns, and provider bias impede care access. The Latino community faces additional challenges navigating healthcare systems and lacks culturally competent outreach.¹

Policy Recommendations

- **Expand Medicaid in Georgia:** Enact Medicaid expansion to cover adults up to 138% of FPL, closing coverage gaps affecting approximately 1.9 million Georgians.⁸ Ensure coverage continuity through pregnancy and postpartum to improve maternal and child health.
- **Integrate PrEP/PEP into Medicaid and Public Health Coverage:** Include PrEP/PEP services within Medicaid expansion. Federally fund outreach, education, and zero-cost programs targeting Latino communities. Train providers to proactively discuss PrEP with Latino and MSM clients.⁶ Pass state-level legislation to allow pharmacists to provide PrEP and the proper counseling that accompanies the medication.
- **Enhance Language and Cultural Accessibility:** Require Spanish-language outreach materials across Medicaid, PrEP, and state/local health entities. Expand the role of community health workers and Spanish-speaking providers for culturally responsive care.

- **Strengthen Maternal and Pediatric Support:** Offer extended Medicaid coverage for pregnant and postpartum women. Increase enrollment support for Latino families, addressing legal status concerns.
- **Community Health Worker Certification:** Establish the Georgia Community Health Worker Certification Committee to set standards, approve training programs, and oversee certification requirements.
- **Expedited Medical Licensing for International Physicians:** Create a pathway for internationally trained physicians to obtain limited provisional licenses, allowing them to practice under supervision in rural counties, licensed hospitals, federally qualified health centers, or accredited medical schools—with the goal of addressing healthcare workforce shortages.

Conclusion

Medicaid and licensing expansion, certification and standardization and reimbursement of Community Health Workers, and equitable PrEP/PEP access represent pivotal opportunities to advance health equity in Georgia. Expanding coverage, improving HIV prevention services, and dismantling systemic barriers would save lives, reduce long-term healthcare costs, and foster healthier communities. By increasing access to community health worker programs and by allowing licensure of international physicians here in Georgia, we can alleviate the burden on the current healthcare system and expand access to medical care for all—particularly for those in rural areas. By centering state action on these priorities, we can fulfill the promise of healthcare as a right, as crucial to Georgia’s future as it is to racial and public health justice.

References & Sources

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