

LULAC Partners with CDC to Share HIV Information With the Latino Community


To raise awareness of HIV in Hispanic/Latino communities, the [League of United Latin American Citizens](#) (LULAC), teamed up with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's](#) (CDC) through CDC's [Partnering and Communicating Together](#) (PACT) initiative. Founded in 1929, LULAC was the first established grassroots organization dedicated to the Hispanic/Latino community in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. "The mission of our organization is to advance the economic condition, educational attainment, political influence, housing, health, and civil rights of the Latino community in the country," says Chief Executive Officer Sindy Benavides.

Through its local councils in communities across the United States, LULAC provides educational opportunities and ensures that each community has the resources needed to get support from local, state, and national groups. LULAC's councils respond to requests coming directly from the local community. "You have to have the interest and the buy-in of the community," remarked Benavides. "Our PACT partnership program to raise awareness of HIV has been really successful because our councils and our members are driving it." Throughout the 4 years of the initiative, LULAC has helped administer more than 4,175 HIV tests. During 2018 alone, LULAC facilitated nearly 1,335 HIV tests.

Getting the Message to Communities

While LULAC had worked on HIV awareness prior to the partnership, it didn't have sufficient resources to dive in as deep as they have through PACT. PACT funding lets LULAC widely promote campaigns such as [Doing It](#) and [Start Talking. Stop HIV.](#), to raise awareness of the importance of HIV testing and of taking [pre-exposure prophylaxis](#) (PrEP) to prevent HIV, and to support community efforts to reduce the stigma around HIV.

LULAC draws from the [Let's Stop HIV Together](#) initiative (formerly known as *Act Against AIDS*) library of images and resources to select materials that represent Hispanics/Latinos. "We have carefully curated the images and the media that we use to show the diversity within our community," says Benavides.



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LULAC understands the grave need for increasing HIV/AIDS awareness and testing in the Hispanic/Latino community. HIV is a serious threat to the health of Hispanic/Latino communities. In 2018, Hispanics/Latinos accounted for [27 percent of the 37,832 new HIV diagnoses in the United States. More than one-third of Hispanics/Latinos with HIV are tested late in their illness and diagnosed with AIDS within one year.](#)

The LULAC national office provides training and resources to its council members and other partners to prepare them to talk with their peers in their communities. During 2018, LULAC worked with 37 partners, including 18 new partners, to promote HIV prevention strategies. LULAC councils “collaborate with community organizations to leverage their collective power,” said Benavides. “We stay current so we can provide up-to-date information to our members,” added Sandra Caraveo, LULAC’s national programs manager. “We also find creative ways to make sure our message about the importance of getting tested reaches the Latinx population,” she continued.

Breaking Down Barriers

In an effort to break down these barriers that breed stigma, LULAC works with its members to engage followers on social media by highlighting personal stories, blogging, and broadcasting on Facebook Live. “There are people within our LULAC membership who are willing to share their story because they care so much about breaking barriers to HIV prevention and care in our community,” said Benavides. Brent Wilkes, LULAC’s former executive director, [participated in CDC’s *Doing It* HIV testing campaign](#), encouraging all adults to get tested.

LULAC is working to eliminate barriers to HIV testing by bringing the tests to Hispanic/Latino communities. At health fairs, known as a [Feria de Salud](#), and other community events, LULAC partners with local organizations to provide free and confidential HIV tests. “This helps community members who may live below the poverty line or who lack access to health services. They don’t have to go to a government building or a hospital facility—the testing is safe and accessible,” shared Benavides. LULAC creates multiple opportunities for community members to interact with us to eliminate the fear and to reinforce HIV messages people hear in traditional or social media. “We understand that sometimes you can’t reach one person with just one touch point. We have to make sure that we’re reaching them in different ways,” said Benavides.

In addition to partnering with CDC, LULAC works with organizations that normally don’t focus on HIV, but want to join forces to make sure they are tackling issues in the community. LULAC partners with the media and shares a HIV toolkit with media outlets so they have the accurate statistics and resources about HIV. They also partnered with [Artitude](#) to help reach their audience through art, spoken word performances, and a traveling exhibit. “Art is a good way for us to challenge misinformation and stigmas that are affecting the Latino community in the United States,” Caraveo concluded.

“*Before we can even get to education, we’ve got to increase awareness of HIV information of prevention, of treatment, of care, of what support resources are available. Whether it’s Spanish or maybe even Spanglish, culturally relevant to our community in a language that they feel comfortable reading and understanding.*”

*Sindy Benavides,
LULAC*

LULAC works to address the fact that one in six Hispanics/Latinos are living with HIV but don’t know it and may not know where to get tested or how to access resources. The primary barriers to HIV testing and health care are “poverty, migration patterns, lower educational levels, and language,” said Benavides. “Immigration status may also make someone less likely to use HIV prevention services to get tested or get treatment, because of fear and lack of access to health services. We can’t forget that there’s still a high level of Latinos who are uninsured and unable to access care.” This is often in addition to conservative traditional views held by some Hispanics/Latinos that generate homophobia and stigma around HIV, which can lead to social isolation.

For more information, please visit *Let’s Stop HIV Together* <https://www.cdc.gov/stopshivtogether>. This project was supported by Cooperative Agreement #PS15-1505 from the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention (NCHHSTP) of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).