



# Social Determinants Affecting the Health of the Hispanic/Latinx Community with Disabilities

Note: We choose to use both Hispanic and Latinx to be inclusive of people from various countries. This is due to how perspectives differ on what countries Hispanic and Latinx each include and exclude. Also, Latinx is a gender inclusive term. Whereas Latino and Latina are generally used to refer to a male or female, respectively.

## Overview

The Hispanic/Latinx (abbreviated as H/L to preserve space) community is the largest non-majority group in the United States and has consistently increased over the years.<sup>3</sup> In 2019, more than 60 million H/L people lived in the United States from all kinds of backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> There are many factors in a person's life that can affect their physical and mental health. In 2018, about 57% of H/L young adults and 40% of H/L adults with serious mental health conditions did not receive treatment.<sup>7</sup> To begin to understand and address this, it is important to consider individual and community level factors.

A relevant and important concept to consider is intersectionality. Intersectionality refers to how a person's identity is made up of overlapping parts that affect our interactions with society.<sup>10</sup> This can include a person's ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, and if they have a disability. About 1 in 6 H/L adults in the United States have a disability.<sup>2</sup> It can be difficult for H/L individuals to find health providers who are culturally competent. Also, it can be challenging to find mental health providers that accept clients with disabilities. As

a result, H/L individuals with disabilities can face overlapping challenges to find and maintain appropriate mental health services. There are many factors to consider to understand how the intersectionality of being H/L with a disability can affect mental health. In this fact sheet, we discuss some of these factors and provide relevant resources.

## Social Determinants of Health and Health Disparities

When a group's overall health is significantly different from people in the majority group, it is a health disparity. Health disparities especially exist in groups who have historically experienced discrimination, such as people with disabilities and the H/L community. This is because these groups still face more challenges that impact their health. A person's genes, biology, and behaviors such as eating habits, drug use, and activity levels typically only account for 25% of their health. Social determinants impact 75% of our health. These are related to conditions a person is born in, lives, works, and ages in. Social determinants of health are made up of three main areas: (1) social environment, (2) physical environment and (3) access to healthcare. H/L individuals with disabilities face overlapping challenges in these areas that can affect their mental health. However, people can also make positive changes and use resources that improve mental health outcomes.<sup>13</sup>

## *Social Environment*

A person's social environment is shaped by factors such as education, cultural background, and level of income.<sup>13</sup> Research shows that the average person's health in the United States improves with their income level.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, if non-majority groups have lower incomes it can affect their health. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median annual income of Hispanic households was about \$20,000 less compared to White, non-Hispanic households in 2017.<sup>11</sup> Also, people with disabilities are more likely to live in poverty and experience education disparities.<sup>1</sup> If finances are limited, a person may not seek out mental health services and will focus on other needs first. However, mental health affects our quality of life in every area, such as our relationships with other people and our jobs.

## *Physical Environment*

Another influential area of health determinants is the physical environment. This includes transportation, housing conditions, and the natural environment.<sup>13</sup> Our physical environment can affect our health and mental health in interconnecting ways. Factors in the natural environment like air quality, water quality, and exposure to chemicals can worsen physical symptoms like asthma.<sup>13</sup> Individuals may choose to live in areas that are more polluted or closer to noise disturbances if they are more affordable. Also, access to transportation has been noted as an essential need for both H/L and people with disabilities in the United States.<sup>4</sup> Transportation barriers contribute to people missing medical appointments delaying care, and missing or delaying when they take their medication.<sup>9</sup> Adequate transportation can reduce social isolation and enhance psychosocial wellbeing for people with disabilities.<sup>6</sup>

## *Access to Healthcare*

Access to healthcare can be affected by where a person lives, the quality of their health

insurance, or if they have insurance.<sup>13</sup> Data shows there is a disparity in who is accessing mental health services. In 2018, the percentage of non-H/L adults who received mental health services was a little more than double the percentage of H/L adults.<sup>8</sup> There are many reasons that can contribute to this disparity. One mother from our [Digital Storytelling Series](#) shared that language barriers made it more difficult for her to find services for her son. In response, she connected her son with a therapist online from outside of the United States. For H/L individuals with disabilities, health insurance can be a significant barrier. This can be due to immigration status and being fearful to access resources if they do not know if they qualify. Some examples of different citizenship statuses that can qualify for federal insurance include permanent residents, temporary residents, asylees, and those with student visas.<sup>12</sup> For more information, you can visit the government Health Care website in [English](#) or [Spanish](#).

## *Resources*

Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) are community health clinics and can be an excellent resource.<sup>5</sup> FQHCs have sliding fee discount programs and offer a wide range of medical services.<sup>5</sup> Some of their services include preventative care, dental, and mental health services. For a clinic to qualify as a FQHC, they must work in an underserved area or with underserved populations.<sup>5</sup> This is why many FQHCs can be found in rural areas and focus on how to better serve Spanish-speakers.<sup>5</sup> If an individual is undocumented, they do not qualify for federal health insurance plans like Medicaid but can seek non-federal health insurance.<sup>12</sup> Also, there are community health clinics that do not ask about immigration status. Insurance is not necessary when using sliding scale discount programs. In some cases, these discount programs can give you a lower copay than when using insurance. You can find a FQHC near you by using the [Find a Health Center search tool](#).

Aging and Disability Centers (ADRCs) can help people with disabilities find transportation options in their area. By using the [Eldercare search tool](#), you can find contact information for ADRCs near you. You can also call their toll-free number 1-800-677-1116 which has Spanish-speaking information specialists available. Another way to get connected with transportation resources is to call your local Center for Independent Living (CIL).

Centers for Independent Living (CILs) are non-profit agencies that are designed to connect people with disabilities with community resources. One of their services is to provide information and referrals for services, such as transportation. CILs also specialize in transition assistance if someone is moving from an institutional setting, like a nursing home, to a community-based residence. You can find local CILs by selecting your state on the [Independent Living Research Utilization website](#).

## Conclusion

Our social environment, physical environment, and access to health care can affect us in clear immediate ways. However, these effects also play a role in our mental health. It can be difficult to change some determinants of health, such as where we live. But H/L individuals with disabilities can advocate for themselves and use resources available to support their health.

## Contributors

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