

## A National Movement for Latino Behavioral Health Workforce and Leadership in the Making

By Henry Acosta, L.S.W., executive director, National Resource Center for Hispanic Mental Health

The lack of a multidisciplinary, bilingual and bicultural behavioral workforce for Latinos is a social justice issue that must be addressed now. The lack of Latino presence in leadership and in the behavioral health workforce contributes to the underutilization of behavioral health care by Latinos, to existing disparities and to the over-representation of Latinos in many of the nation's most vulnerable populations.

“There is a crisis affecting Latinos in need of quality behavioral health services—and in the behavioral health workforce—which can no longer be ignored”, says Dr. Teresa Chapa from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Office of Minority Health (OMH). “While they make up over 15 percent of the overall population, not including the four million residents of Puerto Rico, Latinos are visibly absent from all areas of the behavioral health professions includ-

ing medicine, nursing, psychology and social work and in positions of leadership across the board.”

In an effort to address this nationwide crisis that exists for Latinos in need of behavioral health services, OMH and its grantee, the National Resource Center for Hispanic Mental Health (NRCHMH), convened the nation's first-ever roundtable discussion on developing a more diverse and multidisciplinary behavioral health workforce for Latinos, titled *Movilizándonos por Nuestro Futuro: Strategic Development of a Mental Health Workforce for Latinos* on July 8-10, 2009, in San Francisco.

Nearly 50 leaders in Latino behavioral health participated, including representatives from DHHS leadership, national health and mental health associations, national guild organizations, national Latino advocacy organizations, Latino mental health leadership, state and

**“The time for action is now! Latinos can no longer afford the negative impacts of a fragmented and culturally irrelevant and insensitive behavioral health care system.”**

national foundations, public and elected officials, universities and professional schools, researchers, students, providers and health and mental health promoters. The goal of this event was to formulate a plan that included consensus statements and recommendations specifically aimed at increasing the diversity of our nation's behavioral health workforce and leadership.

The expert group of attendees developed consensus statements, recommendations and action items, which will serve as a blueprint for improving the Latino behavioral health workforce crisis the nation is facing.

The five consensus statements are:

- 1. The Latino population in the U.S. is facing a public health crisis due to unmet needs for behavioral health care.** As Latinos continue to grow in numbers throughout the nation, this crisis will impact the quality of life for all Americans. Failure to address the behavioral health needs of this large and growing population will result in significant negative health, social and economic consequences across the nation.
- 2. The lack of a bilingual and bicultural behavioral health workforce plays a significant role in disparities across all three key areas of behavioral health care service delivery: a) the availability of;**



Alliance steering committee members.

**b) meaningful access to; and c) the provision of quality care.**

**3 Meaningful access to behavioral healthcare for Latinos in the U.S. is a social justice issue.**

Disparities in availability, access and the provision of quality, culturally and linguistically competent behavioral health care for Latinos must be adequately addressed and supported by public and private entities. These services will provide a fair opportunity to live meaningful, independent and productive lives while eliminating Latino overrepresentation in high-need and vulnerable populations.

**4 Latinos deserve a diverse, multi-disciplinary, bilingual and bicultural behavioral health workforce.**

This is critical in order to experience better treatment outcomes, patient satisfaction and overall improved quality of care.

**5 The time for action is now!** Latinos can no longer afford the negative impacts of a fragmented and culturally irrelevant and insensitive behavioral health care system.

**REPORT ON LATINO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

In February 2010, OMH and NRCHMH released a consensus and policy recommendations report based on the *Movilizándonos* meeting. The report contains consensus statements, recommendations and action items focused on developing a more diverse and multidisciplinary workforce for Latinos. The goal is to ensure meaningful access to behavioral health care services for Latinos and increase the representation of Latinos in behavioral health leadership positions. The full report contains numerous recommendations in the following areas:

- engaging federal institutions to advance a Latino behavioral health workforce development agenda;

- expanding public and private partnerships;
- implementing national cultural and linguistic competency standards in behavioral health training programs;
- investing in educational initiatives at local, state and national levels; and
- investing in sustaining current and new innovative workforce development programs.

The full report can be accessed at [www.nrchmh.org](http://www.nrchmh.org).

**ALLIANCE FOR LATINO BEHAVIORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT**

An immediate outcome of the roundtable event was the formation of a steering committee to ensure these recommendations were successfully implemented. A later full-day steering committee meeting was convened, resulting in the creation of the Alliance for Latino Behavioral Health Workforce Development.

The alliance is a strategic partnership of the leading national Latino behavioral health professional organizations and other key leaders in the Latino health and behavioral health professions and workforce development. The mission of the alliance is to ensure that the recommendations contained in the *Movilizándonos por Nuestro Futuro: Strategic Development of a Mental Health Workforce for Latinos Consensus Statements and Recommendations Report* from the OMH are widely disseminated and seriously considered by the array of stakeholders who are needed to successfully address this critically important issue. The NRCHMH, which is lead by NAMI board member Henry Acosta, is spearheading the development and operations of the Alliance with the guidance, direction and leadership of nearly 20 inaugural members of its steering committee, which includes MaJose Carrasco, director of the NAMI Multicultural Action Center.

**ACTIVITIES TO DATE**

The alliance will lead and implement the final consensus recommendations and be charged with creating a process for developing and monitoring an action-oriented, educational awareness and advocacy plan, while engaging multiple stakeholders from across the nation. A major activity of the alliance to date has been the hosting of a Congressional Briefing on Latino Behavioral Health Workforce Development and Leadership in partnership with Rep. Grace F. Napolitano (D-CA), co-chair of the Congressional Mental Health Caucus and Rep. Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA), chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. The briefing took place on June 16, 2010, at the Rayburn House Office Building in Washington, D.C.

The Congressional Briefing aimed at educating members of Congress and their staff on the crisis facing Latinos in need of behavioral health services, with a specific focus on the Latino behavioral health workforce and leadership shortage. The briefing also served as an opportunity for the alliance to officially announce its nomination of Eduardo Morales, Ph.D., distinguished professor of psychology and director of workforce development at the California School of Professional Psychology, San Francisco of Alliant International University to the newly forming National Health Care Workforce Commission, which is currently being created by the federal government as a result of the new health care reform law. Presently, the alliance is working on securing support for the nomination from both the Congressional Mental Health Caucus and the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. At the time of nomination, over 20 groups endorsed the alliance's nomination, including NAMI.

Yet, with so many obstacles to overcome and so little support, a report and an alliance are understandably not enough to achieve all of our goals. To success-

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fully achieve the goals of this initiative and create far-reaching change there will need to be careful examination of the recommendations, investments in education, support from the public-private partnerships and a full commitment to parity. The alliance looks forward to

working with leaders across the nation to create a more diverse and multidisciplinary behavioral health workforce for Latinos and at increasing Latinos representation in behavioral health leadership positions. We want to thank NAMI for inviting us to collaborate on this edition of *Avanzamos*. We are proud

to present articles from different alliance members who describe successful interventions and practices that are helping to increase the numbers of Latinos in mental health professions. For more information visit [www.nrchmh.org](http://www.nrchmh.org) or send an e-mail to [hacosta@nrchmh.org](mailto:hacosta@nrchmh.org).

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- 4) depression was the most important mental health illness observed;
- 5) undiagnosed conditions result in chronic psychosocial problems;
- 6) limited access to stress management techniques leaves residents vulnerable to negative coping strategies (*i.e.* substance abuse); and
- 7) immigration destroys social networks needed to ensure positive mental health outcomes.

VyC established an advisory committee of experienced promotores and

mental health experts to develop a strengths-based, culturally specific mental health training curriculum to prepare promotores to address the issues identified above. *Visión y Compromiso* subsequently developed the Promotora Mental Health Training for the California Institute for Mental Health to be used in California County Mental Health Departments. It is also in the process of developing a Train the Trainers curriculum for the Promotora Mental Health Training.

People with mental illness need to be treated with respect, compassion and empathy, just as anyone with any other

serious but treatable condition. Promotores are attuned to treating individuals with respect and their approach to providing education and services is culturally and linguistically effective with the underserved Latino community. They are effective disseminators of information and service providers who speak the same language as the community they are working with and understand “personalismo” (personal connection/ heartfelt service). Our communities can be transformed by improvements in family mental health brought about by these effective leaders.

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Nicholas Covino, president of MSPP, notes, “One of the most significant contributions to learning and behavior change is an affect-rich educational experience that helps the student move beyond the cognitive to experience real people and circumstances and feel first-hand other customs and aspects of life.”

The Lucero Latino Mental Health Training Program offers both academic

and experiential opportunities for students to deepen their cultural awareness, knowledge and sensitivity as they also follow the standard requirements of their degree and chosen field—doctorate in clinical psychology, school psychology, Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study or counseling psychology master’s programs at MSPP. Each year, students travel to Latin American countries where they are immersed in language training while also working in mental health settings.

To date, seven students have completed the program and are beginning to work with Latinos in their communities or are completing fellowships that will continue to enrich their experience. In total, 43 students have now enrolled in the program and MSPP is continuing its commitment to prepare mental health professionals to significantly impact Latinos in need of mental health care. For more information visit [www.mspp.edu](http://www.mspp.edu).

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Mental Health.

**STUDENT SUPPORT GROUP**

Our Latino and Friends Student Group has developed a mentorship program whereby the members are paired with high school and college students to support them and help them continue and complete their schooling.

**NETWORK**

With funding from the Chicago Community Trust, the center developed the Latino Mental Health Providers Network, which provides an opportunity for mental health agencies that currently serve or wish to serve Latino communities. The network already has over 40 agency members and more than 100 individual members.

We have done much in these short three years, but we can do more with your support. For additional information visit [www.tcscenters.org](http://www.tcscenters.org) or e-mail Hector Torres, Psy.D. at [htorres@thechicagoschool.edu](mailto:htorres@thechicagoschool.edu) or Virginia Quiñónez at [vquinonez@thechicagoschool.edu](mailto:vquinonez@thechicagoschool.edu).