



Latino and Black Voices Unite to Create Mental Health Agenda and Advocate for Mental Health Equity for Communities of Color

For Immediate Release: December 1st, 2021

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The Latino Action Network Foundation today released two policy reports focused on the current state of Latino and Black communities in New Jersey. Among the recommendations, the LAN Foundation calls for funding for pathways to help bridge the gap for Black and Latinx persons seeking to obtain mental health degrees and licensure via supported partnerships and paid residencies.

The reports also highlight the need to incentivize collaboration and co-location of services among community-based organizations, schools, churches, and other social services agencies to reduce gaps and achieve an increase in access to treatment amongst Latinos & Blacks.

“Between the pandemic, rampant racism, and xenophobia, New Jersey’s Black and Brown communities are coping with life-or-death issues daily and our current healthcare systems are failing us,” said Jesselly De La Cruz, Executive Director of the LAN Foundation and Past President of the Latino Mental Health Association of NJ. “COVID-19 has taught us that implicit bias can be life threatening and that communities of color continue to receive less quality care.”

The recommendations include the following:

- Panelists of both roundtables call for the NJ Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services and all mental health licensure boards begin collecting data on race, ethnicity, &



language ability. This way we can begin to assess the client-practitioner ratio in mental health services.

- The reports recommend that programs be developed that integrate Black and Latino paraprofessionals such as Promotors [*Promotoras*] and faith-based leaders in community education to help reduce stigma of the mental health system.
- We are also recommending that Latino mental health and anti-racist curriculums be integrated into professional training and be publicly available. The Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services should also start to gather information about clients' race-related experiences.

In the summer of 2021, the LAN Foundation in collaboration with Salvation and Social Justice organized Black and Latino mental health policy roundtables to create an agenda for action. The roundtables were moderated by Elsa Candelario, MSSW, LCSW, Program Coordinator for the Rutgers Latinos in Social Work Training and Assessment Program, Henry Acosta, Acosta Consulting LLC, and Dr. Tawanda Hubbard, Associate Professor of Professional Practice at Rutgers.

The roundtables produced two policy reports: *NJ Voices Call for Greater Access to Mental Health Services for Latinos* and *Mental Health in the Black Community*. Panelists identified the impact of racism and xenophobia on the mental health of Black and Latino communities, as well as the disparities in accessing quality care.

Both reports are available on the LAN Foundation's website, <https://www.lanfoundation.org/health-justice>. The Latino Action Network Foundation (LANF) is established as a charitable organization with the goal of uniting New Jersey's diverse Latino communities and advancing our economic and social empowerment. We are organized to research the issues impacting the Latino communities of New Jersey, develop policy proposals to address those issues, and conduct outreach to those communities.