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Latinos and Cancer

What was unique about December 2006 in Montgomery County?

For the first time ever, in December 2006, Montgomery County Latino residents were surveyed about their cancer-related behaviors. The survey asked Latinos about cancer risk factors, cancer screening behaviors, and access to healthcare.

How were Latino residents found for the survey?

Trained bicultural and bilingual interviewers knocked door-to-door in 3 economically diverse areas within Montgomery County (with at least 20% households reporting a Latino householder) and invited household members ages 40 and older to participate in a face-to-face Spanish interview. A total of 503 Latinos participated in the interviews.

Why a focus on Latinos?

While we know that: 1) cancer is a leading cause of death among Latinos in the United States (second to cardiovascular disease); 2) cancer occurrence may vary among Latinos because of regional, behavioral, and/or genetic differences; and 3) Latino people have lower survival rates for most cancers, a dearth of information on cancer among Latinos remains.

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What did the survey find?

The survey revealed gaps in cancer knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors. Table 1, for example, shows striking differences in colorectal cancer screening behaviors by various demographic indicators. In short, the more education, income, English-language proficiency, and years in the United States, the more likely Latino respondents had sought colorectal cancer screening. Being employed and having health insurance were also positive predictors of cancer screening.

Table 1. Survey Respondents' Awareness of Colorectal Cancer Screening Tests by Demographic Factors

Education	Some college or more	Kindergarten or less
	66%	42%
Employment status	Employed for wages	Out of work
	58%	42%
Household income	\$35,000 or more	< \$15,000
	62%	46%
Health Insurance	Yes	No
	67%	45%
English Proficiency (speaking) ¹	Gets by or speaks well	Little or no
	61%	50%
Years in United States	20 years or more	0-4 years
	60%	43%
Region of origin	South America	Central America/Other
	73%	47%/33%

¹ In Montgomery County, 67% of Latinos read little or no English; 9% read little or no Spanish; 11% completed Kindergarten or less; 32% completed some elementary school.

Other findings from the survey showed:

EMPLOYMENT: Many Latino respondents reported working in service occupations that pay minimum wage or less and do not provide health benefits. As such, Latinos are disproportionately represented in segments of the workforce that do not receive health insurance or receive it sporadically.

LANGUAGE: Many Latino respondents whose primary language is Spanish reported finding the healthcare system in the United States intimidating partly because it is so different than systems in their home countries. Some reported that perceived discrimination discourages them from utilizing healthcare services.

HEALTHCARE ACCESS: Many Latino respondents reported not having access to cancer screening services because they do not have health insurance (58% of respondents did not have health insurance) and the cost of screening tests are too expensive for them. Of the respondents with no health insurance, 74.3% reported lack of health insurance and exorbitant costs as principle reasons for their not seeking healthcare services.

HEALTH INFORMATION SOURCES: The most frequently cited source of information on health for Latino respondents was television (65%), followed by radio (25%) and doctors, clinics, and medical facilities (13%).

CANCER RISK FACTORS: When asked, 46% cited smoking, 37% family history, 27% diet, and 19% lack of medical or self-care as factors that increase a person's chance of developing cancer (multiple responses were permitted).

CANCER SCREENING SERVICES: Only 23% of respondents 50 years of age and older had had a colonoscopy in the last 10 years. Only 18% of men age 50 and older had had both a prostate-specific antigen (PSA) test and a digital rectal exam. While 69% reported ever having mammogram, only 56% of women had received a mammogram in the past 2 years; 22% had never performed a breast self-exam. Eighty-four percent (84%) reported having a Pap test in the last 3 years. Almost one-half (46%) had never heard of a Fecal Occult Blood Test (FOBT).

AWARENESS OF LOW-COST AND FREE CANCER SCREENING SERVICES:

Although 86% of survey respondents reported they had seen or heard colorectal cancer screening promoted in the media or at healthcare facilities, only 26% were aware that no-cost screenings are available for individuals meeting certain income criteria.

How will the survey findings be used?

In light of the survey findings and the untapped potential of Latino residents to contribute to a thriving county, the Latino Health Initiative proposes to increase the number of: 1) uninsured low-income Latino adults who are aware of the need for cancer screening and who receive appropriate cancer screening; and 2) health care providers who discuss cancer screening recommendations with Latino clients. To achieve these objectives, the Latino Health Initiative will:

Use survey data to develop culturally and linguistically competent cancer education messages and interventions for the Latino population.

- Collaborate with provider networks (e.g., Montgomery Cares, Montgomery Cancer Coalition) to identify effective ways to improve provider communication of cancer screening recommendations.
- Transmit cancer information via mass media communication channels (e.g., Montgomery Community Television Network).
- Identify potential partners for expansion of the neighborhood outreach health promoter model.
- Monitor and document the process and outcomes of the proposed strategies.

Sponsor of survey

The Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene through the University of Maryland commissioned the Latino Health Initiative to conduct this survey.

The full report on the Montgomery County Latino Cancer Survey is available at: http://www.fha.state.md.us/cancer/pdf/MCLCS_2005.pdf

**To learn how you can get involved, visit:
<http://www.lhiinfo.org>**

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