

Young Latinos experience discrimination when obtaining health care, research shows

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Young Latinos living in rural areas say they face discrimination when they obtain health care services - a factor that could contribute to disparities in their rates for obtaining medical care and in their health outcomes, a new study from Oregon State University has found.

Perceived discrimination is considered a barrier to obtaining [health care](#) services for underrepresented populations, including Latinos, according to lead researcher Daniel López-Cevallos, associate director of research for the Center for Latino/a Studies and Engagement at OSU.

The findings were published recently in the *Journal of Immigrant and Minority Health*. The research was co-authored by S. Marie Harvey, associate dean and professor in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences. Harvey received funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to support the study.

Researchers conducted interviews with 349 young adult Latinos, ages 18 to 25, living in rural Oregon. Nearly 40 percent of those interviewed said they had experienced health care discrimination, such as being prevented from accessing services; being hassled; or being made to feel inferior in some way.

"What matters is the perception," Harvey said. "If a person is less likely to seek out services because of that perception, it needs to be addressed."

Latinos are considered an underserved group because they are less likely to obtain regular [health care services](#) and have higher rates of chronic disease such as diabetes than the general population, leading to disparities in their overall health and well-being.

The researchers' goal was to better understand the role perceived discrimination plays in Latinos'

access to and use of health care services. Much of the past research on discrimination in health care has focused on African-Americans and people living in urban settings. This study emphasizes the experience of Latinos living in rural areas, a trend emerging as Latino populations move to [rural areas](#) across the nation, Lopez-Cevallos said.

"We have a different population here, so we want to be able to address concerns in Oregon and other states with growing rural Latino communities," he said.

Addressing health care barriers facing Latinos and other underrepresented groups is important because when health care issues go undiagnosed or untreated, [health care costs](#) tend to rise. Prevention, early diagnosis and disease management are critical components of [health care reform](#) under the federal Affordable Care Act.

Nearly 45 percent of foreign-born Latinos, reported discrimination, compared to about 32 percent of Latinos born in the U.S. Researchers did not ask participants in the study about their immigration status.

Some Latinos may feel discriminated against simply because they are not eligible for health care programs and cannot get the access to services that they need, Lopez-Cevallos said.

Immigration reform policies, such as the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals policy enacted by President Obama in 2012, could also open access for Latinos who are not eligible for care under the Affordable Care Act. People who qualify for the program have access to employment, and employment often leads to access to health care, Lopez-Cevallos said.

The findings also suggest a need to improve "cultural competency" among health care providers, from the doctors to the receptionists to the lab

technicians, so Latinos are treated with respect and dignity, the researchers said.

"It's not all on the doctor, it's up to the whole health care team," Lopez-Cevallos said.

"For young adult Latinos, 'confianza,' a term that encompasses trust, respect, level of communication and confidentiality, is really important," Harvey added. "If they don't feel like they are treated with confianza, they may view that as discrimination."

Provided by Oregon State University

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