

Hispanics and Health Care in the United States: Access, Information and Knowledge

by Gretchen Livingston, Senior Researcher, Pew Hispanic Center
Susan Minushkin, Deputy Director, Pew Hispanic Center
D'Vera Cohn, Senior Writer, Pew Research Center

More than one-fourth of Hispanic adults in the U.S. lack a usual health care provider, and a similar proportion report obtaining no health care information from medical personnel in the past year. At the same time, more than eight in ten report receiving health information from media sources, such as television and radio, according to a Pew Hispanic Center survey of Latino adults, conducted in conjunction with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Previous research by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has shown that Hispanics are about twice as likely as non-Hispanic blacks and three times as likely as non-Hispanic whites to lack a regular health care provider. Hispanics are a diverse community, and the 2007 Latino Health Survey explores not only their access to health care, but also their sources of health information and their knowledge about a key disease (diabetes) at greater depth and breadth than any national survey done to date by another research organization or the federal government.

It finds that among Hispanic adults, the groups least likely to have a usual health care provider are men, the young, the less educated and those with no health insurance. A similar demographic pattern applies to the non-Hispanic adult population that lacks a regular health care provider. The new survey also finds that foreign-born and less-assimilated Latinos--those who mainly speak Spanish, who lack U.S. citizenship, or who have had only short tenures in the United States--are less likely than other Latinos to report that they have a usual place to go for medical treatment or advice.

Nevertheless, a significant share of Hispanics with no usual place to go for medical care are high school graduates (50%), born in the United States (30%) and have health insurance (45%). Indeed, the primary reason that respondents give for lacking a regular health care provider is not related to the cost of health care or assimilation. Rather, when asked why they lack a usual provider, a plurality (41%) of respondents say the principal reason is that they are seldom sick.

As for sources of health information, about seven in ten Latinos (71%) report that they received information from a doctor in the past year. An equal proportion report obtaining health information through their social networks, including family, friends, church groups and community groups. An even larger number--83%--report that they obtained health information from some branch of the media, with television being the dominant source.

Not only are most Latinos obtaining information from media sources, but a sizeable proportion--79%--say they are acting on this information. It is beyond the scope of this report to assess the accuracy and usefulness of health information obtained from non-medical sources. But the survey findings clearly demonstrate the power and potential of these alternative outlets to disseminate health information to the disparate segments of the Latino population.

Regarding the quality of the health care they receive, Latinos are generally pleased, according to the survey. Among Latinos who have received health care in the past year, 77% rate that care as good or excellent. However, almost one-in-four who received health care in the past *five* years report having received poor quality medical treatment. Those who believe that the quality of their medical care was poor attribute it to their financial limitations (31%), their race or ethnicity (29%) or, the way they speak English or their accent (23%).

These findings are from a bilingual telephone survey of a nationally representative sample of 4,013 Hispanic adults conducted from July 16, 2007 through September 23, 2007. The survey's margin of error is +/- 1.83 at the 95% confidence level.

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1615 L Street, NW Suite 700 Washington, DC 20036-5610
p 202.419.3600 f 202.419.3608