



June 22, 2023

## **Long COVID in the Latinx Community: An Unaddressed Consequence of COVID Summit Overview**

**BACKGROUND:** The Latino Center for Health (LCH) organized a virtual, statewide summit, *Long COVID in the Latinx Community: An Unaddressed Consequence of COVID*, on May 5, 2023. The summit's threefold purpose was to **1) convene a broad range of WA state stakeholders**, including elected officials, health officials, and community leaders; **2) learn about long COVID** and its impacts and consequences within the Latinx community; and **3) identify the concerns and needs** of the Latinx community regarding long COVID and how to address them.

The end of the Public Health Emergency funding for COVID on May 11th, 2023, raises serious concerns since the costs of treatments, vaccines, and tests will not be covered by the federal government for underinsured and uninsured Latinx individuals.

**DESCRIPTION:** Fifty-one people participated in the summit. **Dr. Leo Morales**, co-director of the Latino Center for Health, and **Dr. Tao Sheng Kwan-Gett**, chief of health & science, WA State Office of Health Services, delivered opening remarks, followed by a COVID panel discussion featuring the perspectives of **Janna L. Friedly**, executive director of UW Medicine Post-COVID-19 Rehabilitation and Recovery Clinic, **Aarthi Talla**, biostatistician with the Allen Institute for Immunology, and **Lisa McCorkell**, co-founder of the Patient-Led Research Collaborative. Attendees were placed into small group breakout sessions throughout the day to discuss topics proposed by the Latino Center for Health.

**KEY NEEDS AND CONCERNS:** The following represents the voices, experiences, and expertise of the summit's participants during the morning breakout sessions.

1. There is a critical need to build awareness within the Latinx community about the potential for long COVID as a chronic medical health condition that can affect a person's ability to work, quality of life, and livelihood.
  - Long COVID is an under-recognized, under-treated, and under-diagnosed health condition in the community.
  - Participants had concerns about how to disseminate information, noting a lack of culturally and linguistically adapted materials.
  - Lack of healthcare coverage, including gaps, and access to quality healthcare are barriers to Latinx individuals reporting symptoms and receiving treatment for long COVID.
2. There is a need for further clinical and research knowledge about long COVID generally, and the long COVID specific needs and experiences of the Latinx community.
  - We need a standard definition and better treatment guidelines for long COVID.
  - Clinicians need more information and training on how to diagnose and treat long COVID.
  - Lack of NIH studies focused on Latinx and underrepresented communities regarding long COVID—understanding its prevalence, symptoms, and mechanisms.

For agricultural workers and H-2A workers, fear/hesitancy exists to report symptoms due to economic need of Latinx workers to provide for families and fear that they won't be able to enter the country.



**KEY STRATEGIES:** The following are key strategies that emerged from the afternoon breakout sessions.

**1. ADDRESS** vaccine barriers in the community, including the cost, language barriers, access to free vaccine options for the whole family, geographical limitations (e.g., rural communities), the impact on missed wages for workers, concerns related to immigration status (requiring proof of SSI or legal form of ID), uninsured or underinsured individuals, vaccine hesitancy, and COVID fatigue. Disseminate educational materials and outreach with an emphasis on providing culturally and linguistically adapted materials.

*"We found that when we offered access to info or vaccination appointments that matched the needs of our community like evenings/ weekends, we had and still have high engagement."*

**2. SUPPORT** effective local actions to improve community turnout: including distributing vaccines in local community settings, meeting community members where they are, at times they are available, utilizing local physical locations for outreach, and expanding telemedicine or telehealth flexibilities.

**3. CLARIFY** federal guidelines for vaccine access, recommendations for the bivalent vaccine, telehealth flexibilities, and associated end dates. Prioritize and define vulnerable populations and target vaccination efforts for those special groups, including children, seniors, farmworkers, migrant workers, people with comorbidities, and the uninsured.

**4. INCREASE** funding for community health workers or "*promotoras de salud*, patient navigators"—they are trusted and experienced at effectively reaching the community in culturally responsive ways.

*"Inform the legislators about long COVID and ongoing barriers experienced by the community. Review policies and expand the ones that are effective in providing population health."*

**RECOMMENDATIONS:** Participants highlighted three core courses of action.

1. **Establish a state-wide policy for healthcare coverage of undocumented people.**
2. **Communicate effectively to the most vulnerable populations in the Latinx community.**
3. **Engage proactively—make use of incentives, support circles, be out in the community to gain trust, provide and receive the information we value, especially in the healthcare arena.**

### **BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF LCH LONG COVID STUDY WITH PARTNERS**

LCH researchers are currently conducting a survey to estimate the burden of long COVID symptoms and the impact of these symptoms on the physical, mental, economic, and social well-being of Latinx people in Washington state. LCH developed the study in partnership with SeaMar Community Health Centers and Yakima Valley Farm Workers Clinic, along with additional support from researchers at the Allen Institute for Immunology. Data from this study will be used to better understand the needs of Latinx patients and will inform future research efforts and policy recommendations.