

Study highlights barriers to care for Latinos

Latino New Yorkers' perception of their health is often rosier than that of their doctors, [according to a survey](#) by one of the city's largest physician networks.

The report showed just one-third of Latinos think people in their community don't get the care they need, compared with 61% of providers who think certain circumstances prevent Latinos from receiving appropriate care.

Somos Community Care surveyed about 600 patients and 200 providers and compiled recent public and private research on the state of Latino health care in the city. It plans to use the findings to lobby lawmakers on policies that could improve access to care.

The report showed Latinos had higher rates of diabetes, hypertension and asthma than non-Latinos.

"This is going to be our bible," said Dr. Ramon Tallaj, chairman of Somos. "We're going to go everywhere to be sure that those people making decisions pay attention to this."

Somos plays a major role in caring for New York's immigrant communities, with nearly 2,000 providers that care for about 700,000 patients. It is involved in the state's DSRIP Medicaid-reform program as a Performing Provider System and the Medicare Shared-Savings Program through the Balance Accountable Care Organization.

ADVERTISING

The city undertook its own study of Latino health care for the first time last year, finding the group was more likely to be uninsured than non-Latinos by a margin of 22% to 9%. It also showed that despite social, economic and health care access challenges, Latinos had better health outcomes than other New Yorkers.

In the Somos report, patients cited barriers to care including cost, limited access to specialty services and cultural differences, such as the lack of language services.

A 2014 survey from researchers at the New York Immigration Coalition and the New School, referenced in the report, found most of the 13 hospitals and clinics surveyed did not employ full-time or part-time medical interpreters. They often relied on family members or non-trained staff to translate, putting patients at risk. In the Bronx, 10% of providers speak Spanish, compared with 60% of residents, according to the Somos report. The borough needs to recruit more Spanish-speaking doctors, Tallaj said, which Somos could do if it received funding to train community physicians.

"I always tell our patients, 'Choose a doctor in your community who speaks your language and is culturally sensitive and understands you,'" he said.

One issue Tallaj would like to address is the \$3 copay Medicaid charges for clinic visits. He believes it deters people from seeking care.

"Do you know how many patients don't show up to my office after having complications from diabetes because they don't want to spend [the money] that they need for their eggs, the rice and beans, and the chicken for a day or two days?" Tallaj said. "It's the kind of thing we want to work on." —Jonathan LaMantia