



From the desk of the CEO
Mario J. Paredes

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SOMOS gives boost to 2020 Census

COME late winter, the 2020 Census will get underway and—as is the case every 10 years—much is riding on the result of the assessment of the US population. New York City will spend \$40M on promoting the census, more than any other city in the US. New York has engaged the help of more than 150 organizations to help encourage all New Yorkers to participate in the Census, including the poor, the marginalized, immigrants and undocumented individuals and their families.

It is with an eye on the needs of vulnerable communities in New York City that SOMOS Community Care applied for a role in promoting participation in the Census. SOMOS is a network of some 3,000 health-care providers—most of them primary care physicians—serving a patient population of almost one million, comprised largely of Hispanics, African Americans, and Chinese Americans. These communities have largely gone underserved for decades. That is, to a large extent, because they have been under counted in previous Census years due to their lack of participation. As a result, vital federal and state funding for social and medical programs—its level determined by Census counts—failed to come their way.

SOMOS was awarded a grant of \$125,000 by the “New York City Complete Count Fund” to help boost the participation of ethnic minorities in the Census. SOMOS will leverage its network of community-based doctors to promote the 2020 Census to patients, including members of hard-to-reach immigrant communities. SOMOS doctors have the advantage of, in many cases, sharing the same cultural background and speaking the same language as the people under their care.

SOMOS doctors are trusted community leaders and their messaging promoting the Census have a strong chance to be heard. With their encouragement, patients who might be confused about the Census and unaware of its significance—let alone undocumented persons who might be wary about submitting personal data—will be inspired to participate.

SOMOS will be utilizing its extensive presence in immigrant and ethnic minority communities where SOMOS Community Workers serve as doctors’ eyes and ears in neighborhoods and patients’ homes; promotional efforts will include calling on the participation of Community-Based Organizations that partner with SOMOS in addressing the so-called Social Determinants of Health, such as difficulties with housing, transportation,



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employment, etc. These social factors, SOMOS has argued, have a huge impact on physical and mental health.

Enormous sums in federal funding to combat social ills are at stake. SOMOS patients will get a basic Census education that spells out how population counts determine the level of federal funding earmarked to address the needs of communities precisely in the areas of health care, housing, employment, transportation, nutrition, education, etc.

The promotional campaign will also help explain that the Census count will dictate where new schools and clinics will be opened, for example, or where public transportation is improved or where a fire department is put in place. Businesses, too, will use the Census to determine where to allocate resources to set up factories, establish offices, or open stores—key ingredients in job creation.

Nationwide, in play is the distribution of more than \$675B in federal funding earmarked for the annual support of vital programs in states, counties and communities. Hence, it is vitally important that New York City's most vulnerable population is accurately counted. The situation has taken on extra urgency given the potential of draconian cuts in the New York State budget for the funding of public programs in New York City, such as Medicaid and Medicare.

Mandated by the US Constitution, the Census also helps determine the number of seats each state has in the House of Representatives. The population count is also significant for the redrawing of new congressional and state legislative districts, as adjustments are made based on where populations have decreased or increased. According to reports, if New York City's 8.6M residents are undercounted, the state may lose billions in federal funding and as many as two of its 12 congressional seats.

The Census record of New York City is not great; the 2010 Census had a response rate of 62 percent, compared to the national average of 76 percent; some neighborhoods—likely those that are home to particularly needy New Yorkers—scored just 35 percent. The prognosis for the 2020 Census is pessimistic, forecasting a participation rate of 58 percent. Hence the urgency for SOMOS and the other community-based organizations to get the word out about the critical importance for everyone to participate in the 2020 Census.

In the coming weeks and months SOMOS will distribute promotional Census tool kits to some 250 medical practices and collaborate with Managed Care Organizations' community engagement staff. The organization will promote the Census—in English, Spanish and



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Chinese— at community and physician-focused events, as well as a part of after-school programs. SOMOS will also put to work its digital footprint, including social media, and a platform capable of sending text messages to 100,000 New Yorkers. To promote the 2020 Census, SOMOS will above all bank on the privileged relationship of its doctors with New York City’s ethnic and immigrant communities.

For SOMOS, promoting participation in the Census is a matter of embracing its civic duty. The organization is committed to educating its patient population as a form of service to the nation that has welcomed immigrants and ethnic minorities. The SOMOS leadership is committed to contributing to the building up of the US as a fair and just society. All New Yorkers should be counted, said SOMOS Founder and Chairman Dr. Ramon Tallaj, “to ensure the resources and funds we need and deserve are allocated accordingly.”