

Community Outreach Tool Kit for Parenting Healthy, Tobacco-Free Hispanic/Latino Youth Hispanic/Latino Cultural Overview

INTRODUCTION

The United States has been described as a “Nation of Immigrants,” as a “mosaic,” or, more traditionally, as a “melting pot” of cultures. In fact, cultural diversity is a common thread in the fabric of American society. Culture, meaning how a group functions in society, has been defined as:

...multiple influences, including race, ethnicity, nationality, language, and gender, but it also extends to socioeconomic status, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation, and occupation, among other factors. These influences can collectively be described as ‘socio-cultural factors,’ which shape [people’s] values, form [their] belief systems, and motivate [their] behaviors.¹

Culture is what people live everyday—everyone shares their culture with others in their homes, work, and public places. To better communicate with specific groups of people, it is important to clearly understand their values, beliefs, and everyday activities.

The Hispanic/Latino community consists of a variety of groups representing different Latin American countries that have contributed significantly to the American mosaic. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, Hispanic/Latino communities are groups of different origins, which means they can include Black, White, Asian, or any other race. The Hispanic/Latino community includes people with various skin colors, body sizes, hair types, and accents. Likewise, their culture includes a wide range of attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors.

One factor that sets Hispanics/Latinos apart from each other in the U.S. is their place in the acculturation process. The term “acculturation” refers to how much, and how quickly they adapt to another culture while maintaining their own cultural attitudes, beliefs, and values. How quickly and fully a person adopts a new culture depends on many issues, including his or her age, language skills, length of time spent in the United States, and level of education. Understanding this process is critical when learning how best to talk about positive health behaviors in the Hispanic/Latino community.

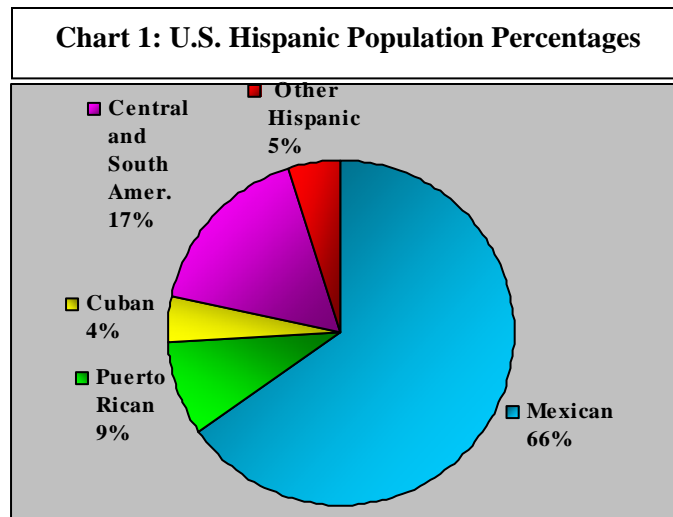
¹Betancourt, Joseph R., Green, Alexander R., and Carillo, J. Emilio. “Cultural Competence in Health Care: Emerging Frameworks and Practical Approaches.” Field Report, October 2002. p. 1.

DEMOGRAPHICS IN THE UNITED STATES

For generations, Latin American immigrants have come to the United States, and have taken their place as contributing members of American society and the nation's economy. In 2000, about 12.5 percent of the U.S. population—or 35.3 million out of a total of 281.4 million U.S. residents—identified themselves as Hispanics or Latinos. As of July 1, 2002, this figure had grown to 38.8 million, or 13.4 percent of the U.S. population, making Hispanics/Latinos the largest “minority” population in the United States. If this trend continues, the Census Bureau estimates that almost one in four U.S. residents will be Hispanic/Latino in the year 2050.

PRESENCE IN AMERICA

The terms “Hispanic” or “Latino” refer to Spanish-speaking people born in North, Central, and South America, as well as in the Caribbean. Today, 66 percent of U.S. Hispanics/Latinos are from Mexico, followed by 17 percent from Central and South America, 9 percent from Puerto Rico, 4 percent from Cuba, and the remaining 5 percent from other regions (see Chart below).



Source: Current Population Survey, March 2005

The firmly established Hispanic/Latino presence is felt throughout the U.S. In fact, several states have large Hispanic/Latino populations, including:

- Texas (6.7 million);
- New York (2.9 million);
- Florida (2.7 million); and
- Illinois, Arizona, and New Jersey (more than 1 million each).

California has the largest Hispanic/Latino population of all, with almost 11 million; this means that one out of three Americans of Hispanic/Latino origin live in California.²

Immigration and birth rates among Hispanics/Latinos have fueled their rapid growth in the US. Factors helping the Hispanic/Latino population increase include:

- Continued immigration from Mexico and Central America;
- Increased immigration from South America;
- Temporary workers and undocumented Hispanics/Latinos remaining in the U.S.; and
- Increased number of Hispanics/Latinos born in the U.S.

Hispanic/Latino populations in states and cities that traditionally had large numbers continued to grow in recent years. However, growing numbers of Hispanics/Latinos are also moving to areas where, historically, they did not live. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the U.S. Hispanic/Latino population has spread out to the point that Hispanics/Latinos are the largest “minority” population in 23 states.

As an example, increasing numbers of Hispanics/Latinos have been showing up in states without well-established communities, including: Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Alabama, Kentucky, Arkansas, Nevada, Minnesota, Nebraska, and South Dakota. Cities with major Hispanic/Latino neighborhoods include: Atlanta; Denver; Phoenix; Portland, Oregon; Seattle; and a number of towns in Utah.

The growth of the Hispanic/Latino population in southern states has been especially rapid. For example, from 1990 to 2000 the states below experienced these sharp increases in their Hispanic/Latino populations:

- Arkansas—337 percent
- Georgia— 300 percent
- Tennessee—278 percent
- South Carolina—211 percent

² “The Geography of Diversity in the U.S.” Population Reference Bureau website.
<http://www.prb.org/AmeristatTemplate.cfm?Section=2000Census1&template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=8226>

LANGUAGE, ACCULTURATION & HEALTH

About 32 million Americans (14 percent of the U.S. population) speak a language other than English at home, according to the Census Bureau. Spanish is the main “other language” in the United States—the fifth largest Spanish-speaking country in the world.

More than half of those who don’t speak English at home speak Spanish, and, as of 2002, approximately 11 percent of the U.S. population over the age of 5 spoke Spanish in the home. U.S. Hispanics/Latinos are as varied in terms of language as they are culturally.

For example, some speak:

- Only Spanish;
- Only English;
- Both languages; or
- “Spanglish,” a mixture of the two languages.

Marketing and communications professionals who want to communicate well with one or more of these groups will develop targeted campaigns to match their preferred language. The Hispanic/Latino market is composed of immigrants, as well as first, second, third, and fourth generations. Their ability to speak English varies drastically, depending on where they are in the acculturation process. In order to understand the important role acculturation plays and to effectively address Hispanic/Latino health issues, it is critical to know their culture and its characteristics.

In the acculturation process, recently arrived Hispanics/Latinos living in the United States are generally those who:

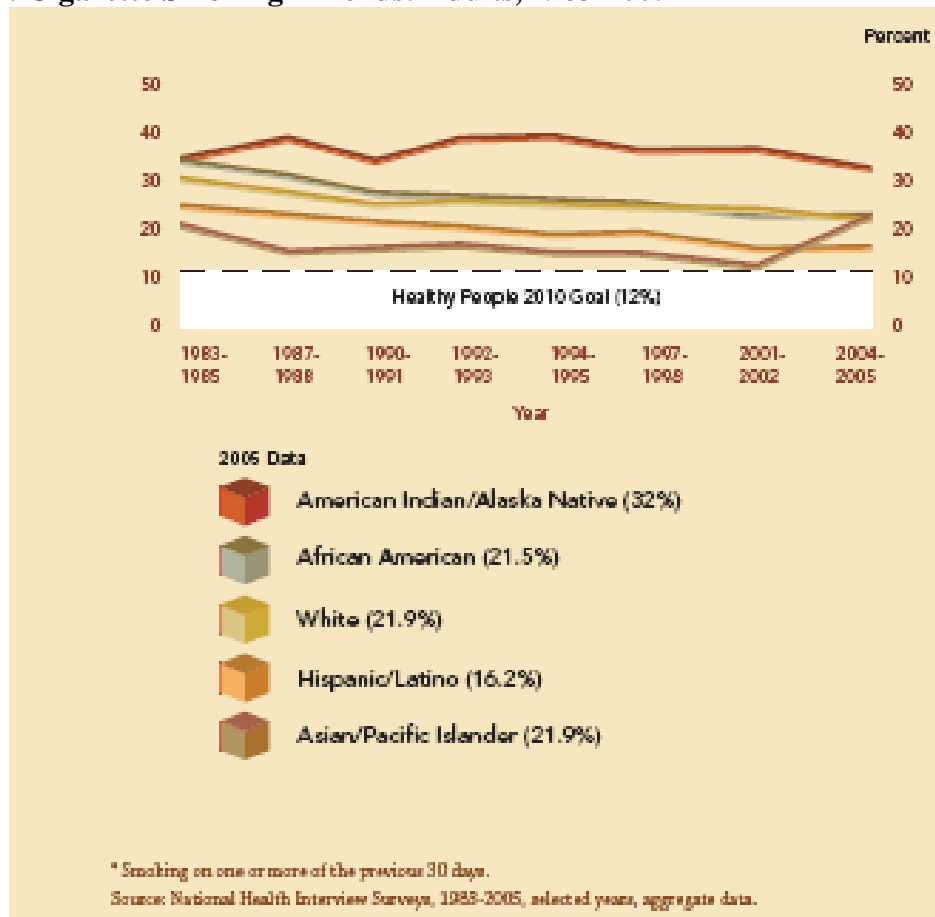
- have spent less than ¼ of their life in the U.S.,
- have attitudes and behaviors that stem from their country of origin,
- consume products similar to those from their home countries, and/or
- are Spanish-language dominant and prefer to be addressed in Spanish.

This community of new arrivals will generally bring with them many of the customs, habits, and even health beliefs they practice in their countries of origin. Recent studies have shown that these Hispanics/Latinos have more favorable health behaviors and risk factor profiles than do non-Hispanic whites. Some researchers believe that acculturation into the American mainstream could, in some cases, lead to a decrease in health-promoting behaviors carried over from an immigrants’ country of origin.

Furthermore, these researchers believe the longer an immigrant child lives in the United States, the higher the chance to adopt the behaviors and values of their new environment. However, this includes adopting the good and bad behaviors in today’s society. Given this, the younger generations of immigrants may practice increased levels of drinking, smoking, and drug use. Fortunately, smoking trends among Hispanic/Latino adults in the U.S. are lower than that of whites, African Americans, and American Indians/Alaska Natives (see Chart 2) which may reflect that many recently arrived Hispanics/Latinos are

acculturating at a slow pace and maintaining their protective health behaviors from their countries of origin.

Chart 2: Cigarette Smoking* Trends: Adults, 1983-2005



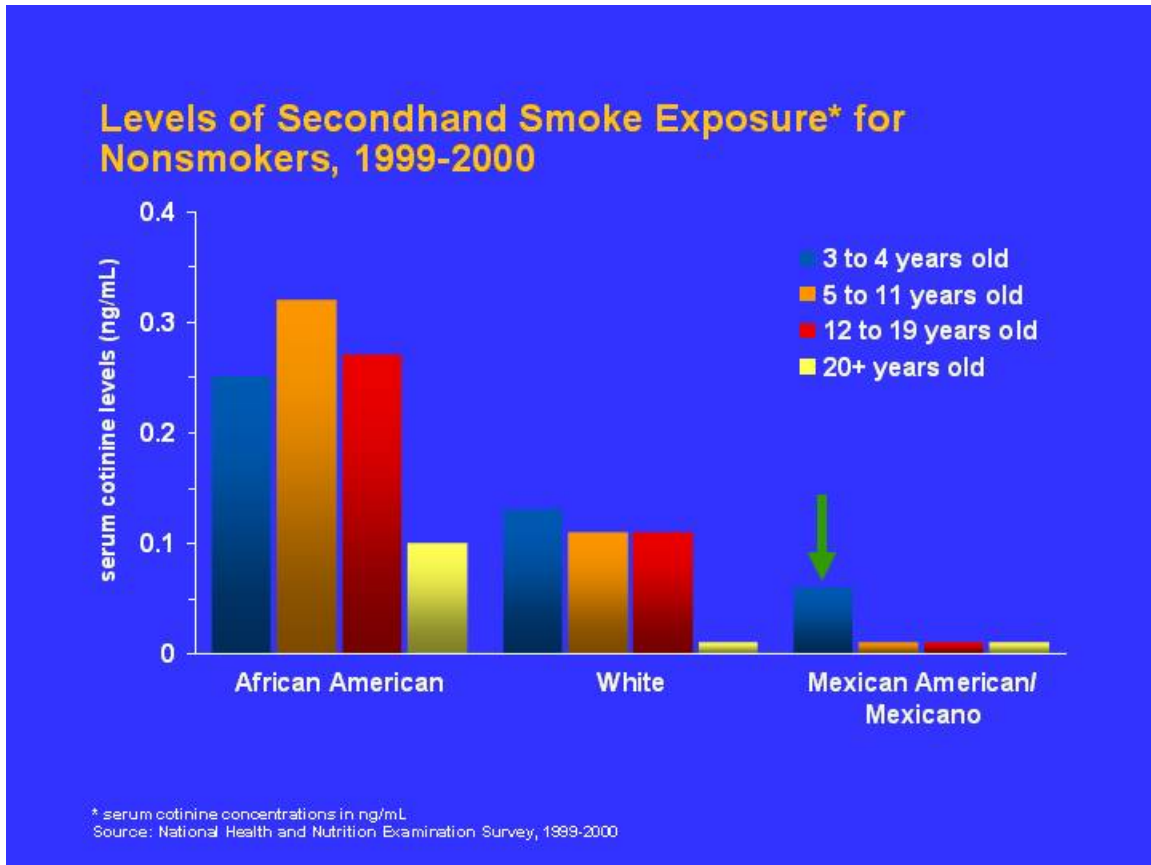
The low number of Hispanics/Latinos who smoke is further supported by cultural traits which are observed in strong parental disapproval among the Hispanic/Latino populations. This is especially true with regards to parents’ disapproval of smoking among females which they might consider culturally inappropriate or improper. The current rate of Hispanics/Latinos who do smoke is the result of socioeconomic status, cultural characteristics, acculturation level (low to high), stress, advertising, cigarette prices, parental/community disapproval, and communities’ abilities to mount effective tobacco-control initiatives.³

Now more than ever is an opportune time to promote to the growing Hispanic/Latino community, and especially their youth, the health benefits of not smoking tobacco. Grass roots outreach efforts will have a greater impact with the coordinated support of community-based organizations and state/local-level tobacco prevention specialists. Together, they can effectively address and communicate the negative impacts of smoking

³ Betancourt, Joseph R., Green, Alexander R., and Carillo, J. Emilio. “Cultural Competence in Health Care: Emerging Frameworks and Practical Approaches.” Field Report, October 2002. p. 1.

and secondhand smoke exposure for nonsmokers in the Hispanic/Latino community⁴ (see Chart 3).

Insert Chart 3: Levels of Secondhand Smoke Exposure* for Nonsmokers, 1999-2000



*Cotinine is an indicator of secondhand smoke exposure.

Tobacco prevention professionals and Hispanic/Latino community leaders can jointly empower Hispanic/Latino immigrants (low-aculturated individuals) by providing them the facts on cigarette smoking while they are still adapting to a new culture, with different lifestyles, customs, and values. While Hispanics/Latinos are developing new approaches to interacting and living in their new environments, they will know the importance of maintaining the protective health behaviors of not smoking.

This overview, and the accompanying tool kit, will provide approaches, information, communication tools, and other resources for recently arrived Hispanic/Latino parents, community-based organizations, and businesses interested in engaging in tobacco prevention and secondhand smoke reduction efforts for Hispanic/Latino youth.

⁴ U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2006.