

United States Senate

May 28, 2021

The Honorable Xavier Becerra
Secretary of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20201

The Honorable Marty Walsh
Secretary of Labor
200 Constitution Ave NW
Washington, DC 20210

Dear Secretary Becerra and Secretary Walsh,

Recent surveys show that unvaccinated Latinos are more than twice as likely as unvaccinated Whites to want a COVID-19 vaccine, yet they report that they are reluctant to seek them out due to continued misinformation about vaccine cost, safety, and sick leave policies. We write to request that you work together to address this gap. Specifically, we ask that you work with employers and health care providers to clarify sick leave policies related to vaccine side effects and to make clear that the vaccine is available for free and without regard to immigration status.

Latino communities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19: Latinos are 1.3 times more likely to have contracted COVID-19, 3.1 times more likely to be hospitalized with COVID-19 complications, and 2.3 times more likely to die from infection with the virus. Additionally, Latinos suffered higher rates of job loss even as their access to safety net programs was lower than other groups. Finally, Latinos continue to trail in vaccination rates, which is not solely explained by vaccine hesitancy. Rather, there are very real systemic barriers like lack of access to vaccination sites and poor information availability on their eligibility for a vaccine.

Throughout the pandemic, Latinos have faced systemic, access-related barriers to testing, treatment, and vaccinations. Despite this, a recent survey conducted by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that unvaccinated Latinos are two times more likely than White adults to express interest in getting vaccinated. Unfortunately, study respondents also cite multiple barriers to getting vaccinated, all of which the federal government can help address.

Although vaccinations are available to anyone regardless of immigration status, more than half of Latino families cite concerns with providing information that might reveal their immigration status or that of a family member. Survey participants also cited vaccine cost or lack of insurance coverage, even though

vaccines are free. Finally, nearly two-thirds of Latinos surveyed expressed concerned about missing work due to vaccine side effects.

In order to improve vaccination rates, particularly among those that have expressed an interest in receiving the vaccine, we urge the Departments of Health and Human Services and Labor to work together creatively and proactively to allocate additional resources to ensure correct and timely information is reaching Latino communities, including clarification that confidential information about immigration status will not be revealed and assurance that vaccination is free. We also urge you to undertake efforts to increase public awareness regarding worker protections after vaccination.

Latinos are one of the fastest growing populations in the United States, and our country's recovery from the pandemic is contingent upon vaccinating all people as quickly as possible and that requires ensuring that everyone has accurate and adequate information. Latinos are eager to do their part to help end this public health emergency, and they deserve our support. Until we, as a nation, make the vaccine available to every individual who resides within our borders, the COVID-19 virus will remain an ever-looming threat on the horizon.

Sincerely,



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Robert Menendez
United States Senator



Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator



Ben Ray Lujan
United States Senator