

# Combined Reflections:

## 1. How did COVID impact the work of your community partners?

Who? **Ashley Mills, Drew Weller, Juan Carlos Dominguez, Mathew Idichandy**

Su Casa works in different avenues to aid the Latino/Hispanic population in Cincinnati. They serve as a beacon for support for their community, but due to the COVID-19 pandemic, they had to limit their operations to ensure proper social distancing. The switch to remote format meant that their classes and programs had to be delivered virtually, or otherwise postponed. In addition, programs such as the health fairs and food hand-out drives were canceled in order to give Su Casa more manpower to make in-home deliveries.

The Su Casa Team began delivering essential food and supplies to families as soon as the stay-at-home order began, especially to clients enrolled in their case management services, clients who lost their jobs, and clients who do not have transportation. Some were sick with COVID-19.

With Su Casa established as a resource center within the Hispanic community of Cincinnati through prior community projects, since the COVID crisis began, it has become a *de facto* communicator of updated COVID information. This is especially true because of the language barrier between the clients of Su Casa and the English COVID announcements that are the most widely distributed from governmental resources and news channels. As a result, Su Casa began distributing official COVID information on its social media outlets to inform their client base of the updated information, and they continue to do so. Some Su Casa staff members made personal phone calls or visits to community members to give them updates on how to be safe during the pandemic. In addition, Su Casa has been sending out text messages to their community with updated information in Spanish including links to videos that provided further explanation. Challenges to this approach, especially for the delivery of online classes is that many Hispanic/Latinos individuals do not have internet or computer access and therefore were unable to access the online classes, videos, and information.

As we worked with Su Casa over the last year it became apparent that mental health resources and guidance were critical to the community partner's plan of action for addressing many of the challenges the community presents. As isolation has increased and our plans to work with the community were cancelled, the pandemic became a large threat to mental health. Parents had growing concerns about being unable to provide for their families due to loss of employment and with children being home all the time, the opportunities to find a job have further diminished. Many Latino/Hispanic individuals work in the service industry, construction, landscape, etc. Their jobs did not always provide proper protection against COVID-19, so going to work would increase their risk of infection. This dilemma added to families' stress by forcing them to choose between endangering their families or being able to provide for them. In addition, many live in multi-family homes, i.e. one house with 2-3 families living in it. These tight quarters also increased the stress during shelter-in-place, furthering the impact of COVID-19 on the population. Many of the parents are currently in the process of obtaining legal status in the country which is making their prospects of getting help from any future aid packages from the government quite murky. Su Casa continues to put their workers and volunteers in a position to help the local communities to the best of their abilities, but with these new developments their work has become much more complicated.

COVID has also made it more difficult for families in the area to have their basic needs met. Many families are lacking certain basic supplies for daily living, and there is increased need for donations for families who are now financially struggling more because of the pandemic. Fortunately, Su Casa has received grants and support to provide direct financial assistance to their most vulnerable clients. A service that before they were not providing due to funding, but the pandemic has brought to light many inequalities and therefore, additional support for Su Casa's clients.

## **2. How did COVID impact the community and clients served by your community partners?**

**Leah Beck, MaKayla Beecham, Nicole Bardakos, Prasun Shah**

COVID-19 disproportionately impacted the Hispanic community and clients served by Su Casa Hispanic Center through increased unemployment, housing difficulties, worsening mental health, and challenges with language barriers. Many of these individuals were already struggling with job security and faced difficulties getting government financial assistance due to civil status, or did not qualify for stimulus checks. Those who did lose their job also struggled to find new work due to many locations not hiring people given financial strain. A large number of working Hispanics have occupations in the service sector where they cannot work from home and must risk possible exposure to COVID in order to continue bringing home a salary. This presents further problems because Latinos often live in homes with many members and if one person is exposed to COVID, they do not have their own space to be able to self-quarantine. Multigenerational homes with children, adults, and grandparents pose a unique barrier to isolation, especially for higher-risk individuals such as the elderly who may play a significant role in childcare and family structure.

Mental health is already a stigmatized topic in many Latino communities, and COVID-19 has led to further difficulties regarding isolation in quarantine and anxiety about what the future holds for their health, financial status and the general state of the nation in these uncertain times. In June, a poll found that over 20% of Latinos are experiencing increased anxiety due to the virus and lockdown while nearly 16% are experiencing increased stress ([Salud-America](#)). Access to mental health providers such as psychiatrists and therapists is also disproportionately limited to the Latino community as a result of the language barrier, lack of insurance and lack of knowledge about when and where to get help. Our community partner, Su Casa, works to combat this disproportionate availability of mental health resources. This year Su Casa obtained funding from the Ohio Commission for Hispanic/Latino Affairs and started a Health Navigator Program. Unfortunately, one challenge in the region is the lack of enough bilingual mental health providers to serve this community.

Su Casa provides appointments to community members with Spanish-speaking psychologists and psychiatrists; however, their waitlist is over 2 months long as the demand for services is greater than the availability of providers.

The language barrier many Hispanics face has been heightened during the pandemic, as much of the COVID-19 communications and news updates are communicated primarily in English. Fortunately, many official sources of information have realized this and are providing information not only in English and Spanish, but also in other languages. Despite this, many members of the Hispanic community haven't received education on concepts concerning COVID such as being an asymptomatic carrier, and therefore they don't feel it necessary to quarantine if they test positive but feel healthy.

All of the above factors that pose unique challenges for the Hispanic/Latino community during this unprecedented pandemic underlie the fact that the Hispanic/Latino population and other non-white minorities are diagnosed and hospitalized for COVID-19 related illnesses at rates disproportionately higher than their White counterparts. Since March 1st, Hispanic and black children across the nation have been hospitalized with laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 illness at a higher rate than their white counterparts (Kim et al). In Ohio specifically, 6.23% of confirmed COVID-19 cases have been in the Hispanic population. This is almost double the total Hispanic population of Ohio, which is only 3.6%.

#### References:

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### **3. How might students and physicians use their platform to advocate for the needs of your partners and their community?**

**Who? Robert Powell, Gabriel Gonzalez Claudia Mort, Fernando Blank**

In the midst of COVID, there exists many different opportunities for medical students and physicians to advocate for the needs of Su Casa and the Latinx community, a community that has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. Conducting academic research on the impact of the virus on the Hispanic community helps identify key areas, such as loss of work, that have disproportionately affected Latinx people, and allows us to proceed with possible solutions. These academic studies also present these challenges to the academic community to represent the needs of the Cincinnati Latinx population.

As found with academic research on Latinx people with COVID, this population of people was affected disproportionately with loss of work and support from the government. Many of these people work service-industry type jobs which many became unsustainable once the virus

became more prevalent. Additionally, this community was largely ineligible for government assistance due to the high rate of undocumented immigrants. Any community outreach event that serves the community such as diaper drives, food drives, mask drives all instrumentally make a positive impact because many of these people are unable to receive these supplies otherwise due to financial constraints.

One of the biggest concerns for much of the community is being able to afford medical attention, especially if they were to have contracted the virus. With much of the population being from a low socioeconomic status and lacking medical insurance, many are left without many options. Luckily, there are two medical clinics (Good Samaritan Clinic in Price Hill and CrossRoads Health Center) dedicated in helping this vulnerable population out by offering free/cheap services for the uninsured. As a group, our main objective is to help spread this valuable information so that the community is aware of where to go if the situation arises where they need to seek medical attention.

Our goal as a LC is to continue to identify the needs of Su Casa in light of the pandemic and get involved to support the Latinx community in the greater Cincinnati area. An issue that Su Casa had early on in the pandemic was communicating accurate scientific information about the virus to its community members who often lacked many sources of media to obtain accurate information - especially accurate news in Spanish. Now as the pandemic is evolving and has impacted the lives of virtually everyone in the United States, our next step would be to communicate to Su Casa about the areas they need support and where we can fit in to help. Many of their services, such as English courses, financial guidance, and healthcare support have now had to change structure due to the pandemic, and something we could as a LC to support Su Casa is to help them adapt to the new socially-distanced structure of these services to continue to reach the community.