



California Latinas for Reproductive Justice

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PRESS RELEASE

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Low-Income Latina Women to Suffer Significant Harm From Proposed Cuts to Medi-Cal and Safety Net Health Services

Dismal State of Health Insurance Highlights Growing Silent Epidemic Among California's Latinas

LOS ANGELES, CA – January 13, 2009 – California Latinas for Reproductive Justice's (CLRJ) new Policy Brief highlights the growing silent epidemic of Latinas' lack of health insurance and the vital role that California's public health programs play in sustaining Latinas' health. Released today, "***Access to Health Insurance: A Vital Step in Promoting Latinas' Reproductive Health & Justice***," documents the dismal state of health insurance among California Latinas as California's leaders continue to debate funding for critical public health programs within the state budget.

CLRJ's Policy Brief highlights the urgency of maintaining funding for public health programs – such as Medi-Cal, Healthy Families, and Family PACT – that play a vital role in closing the gap in access to health care and reproductive health disparities experienced by California's Latinas. The state's public health programs provide a critical entry point for low-income Latinas to receive necessary medical attention and preventive services. This is especially critical in difficult economic times when low-income Latinas are significantly burdened by external economic factors.

"The number of uninsured Latinas in California is already reaching epidemic proportions," said Rocio L. Córdoba, CLRJ's Executive Director. "California cannot afford to ignore Latinas' disproportionate lack of access to health insurance, which has served to exacerbate reproductive health disparities and deny Latinas' reproductive justice. California policymakers must remain steadfast in developing innovative solutions to expand access to health insurance to the most vulnerable California communities. To maintain the status quo, or worse, reduce Latinas' limited options, would place low-income Latinas' lives at risk."

CLRJ's Policy Brief indicates that Latinas have the highest rates of being uninsured across all racial and ethnic groups of women. Analyzing data from the UCLA California Health Interview Survey, CLRJ found that Latinas comprised over half of California's women without health insurance in 2005 and were twice as likely to be uninsured for the entire past year compared to white women (52.7% vs. 24.7%). Among Latinas under age 65, over 1.4 million lack health insurance. Latinas are three times as likely to be uninsured than are white women (39.3% vs. 13.4%), with nearly four out of ten Latinas being uninsured all or part of the year.

Research demonstrates that women with health insurance are more likely to receive preventive, primary, and specialty care, and have better access to new medical developments. Women without access to health insurance are more likely to postpone care, delay or forego obtaining important reproductive health screenings, and less likely to take medications.

Lack of access to timely preventive health services—such as mammograms, Pap tests, or regular check ups—has contributed greatly to Latinas’ reproductive and sexual health disparities. Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer deaths among Latinas. Latinas also have the highest risk of developing cervical cancer and represent one-third of diagnosed invasive cervical cancer cases in the state each year. Increasing Latinas’ access to health insurance is critical to ensuring that Latinas receive life-saving and less costly preventive care.

The Policy Brief demonstrates the lack of options Latinas face in obtaining health coverage. Although employer-sponsored health insurance is the primary source of coverage for all women in California (55.7%), it is not reaching the majority of Latinas. Thirty one percent (31%) of Latinas are not offered employer-based health benefits compared to 12% of White women. Therefore, low-income Latinas are forced to rely on a patchwork of sources to obtain health care.

“The well-being of over 1.4 million Latinas hangs on the line every time the Medi-Cal program is on the state budget’s chopping block,” said Marisol Franco, CLRJ’s Policy & Advocacy Manager.

Medi-Cal, the largest provider of health coverage for all of California, is also the primary source of health insurance for 1.4 million Latinas. Latinas rely on Medi-Cal for their reproductive and overall health care needs accounting for nearly half (45%) of female Medi-Cal beneficiaries. Among Latinas, nearly one third (29.4%) receive health coverage through Medi-Cal.

Similarly, Latinas represent a significant segment of other vital public health programs. For example, Latinas comprise 57.5% of Healthy Families participants and represent nearly two out of three women who use Family PACT.

Given Latinas’ reliance on Medi-Cal and other major public health programs, CLRJ’s Policy Brief sets forth a set of policy recommendations urging lawmakers to preserve these critical programs in order to sustain the health of California’s most underserved Latinas.

CLRJ’s Policy Brief, *Access to Health Insurance: A Vital Step in Promoting Latinas’ Reproductive Health & Justice*, is available for downloading at <http://www.californialatinas.org/policy>.

CLRJ is a statewide policy and advocacy organization whose mission is to advance California Latinas’ reproductive health and rights within a social justice and human rights framework. CLRJ works to ensure that policy developments are reflective of the priority needs of Latinas, their families and their communities.

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