



# Voices of Immigrants in Action

VIA's mission is to promote dynamic communication addressing the emerging issues of the Hispanic immigrant communities; mobilizing a multi-level response to factors affecting HIV/AIDS transmission in Hispanic Immigrant communities in the rural South.



## --- Snapshot ---

### Risk Factors for HIV/AIDS & the Rural Hispanic Community

**Overview:** There is a void in HIV/AIDS Incidence data that specifically focuses on Hispanic Immigrants in the South as a unique community. This is critical to quantifying prevalence and addressing prevention, especially since it is estimated that 1 in 52 Hispanics will receive an HIV diagnosis in their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> The South is recognized as the epicenter of HIV/AIDS in the U.S.,<sup>2</sup> with seven of the 10 states having the highest rates of new HIV infection.<sup>3</sup> The South is also ranked lowest in “overall health,”<sup>4</sup> which doesn't take into account the care access experiences of this population, 1) with limited English proficiency, 2) which is highly mobile, and 3) is forced to maneuver within an ever-increasing xenophobic environment.

**Social Factors:** Social determinants, articulated in the 2010 VIA Community Survey, that place this community at an elevated HIV/AIDS risk include: poverty, under-employment, lack of access to care, migration, discrimination, homophobia, limited rights, defined gender roles, alcohol abuse and depression.

**HIV Priority:** Many immigrants, documented or not, do not have the luxury of prioritizing HIV. The stress related to living without documents, combined with high unemployment rates, has resulted in the observation of increased alcohol use, depression, domestic violence and an increase in the number of youth who have dropped out of school (See *VIA Snapshots on women and youth*). The community reports that it is further burdened by fear, exploitation, financial challenges and resulting health issues.<sup>5</sup>

**Call to Action:** Therefore, as socio-economic status is a powerful predictor of health and illness, the potential elevated risk for HIV infection for Hispanic Immigrants who live in the South cannot be ignored.<sup>6</sup> Combating such intense health determinants will require community-unity along with commitments by state, regional and federal partners to create community-focused data and, most importantly, an ambitious, respectful pledge to battling the epidemic with targeted precision.

#### The Hispanic Community's Greatest Concerns\*

25%

Lack of legal documents

(residency papers, driver's license)

24%

Lack of stable work

11%

Youth dropping out of school

8%

Increased alcohol consumption

Additional risk factors that were mentioned:

- 19% unemployment
- 10% immobilized by fear
- 9% health-related problems
- 6% exploitation

\*Data results taken from 188 in-depth interviews with Hispanic Immigrants in North Central Florida and Eastern Tennessee as part of the 2010 VIA Community Survey.

## Diminishing the Challenges

*Actions to impact the prevalence of HIV among Hispanic Immigrants will require a blending of community-based actions and intuitive attention from health /social institutions.*

### VIA Recommendations

*Community-driven recommendations construct a bridge for both community engagement and to shift policy and programs for improved service delivery.*

#### **Broaden the Dissemination of Focused Advocacy/Policy Tools**

To sustain delivery of relevant information to policy brokers addressing social determinants and emerging issues around Hispanic Immigrants and their correlating HIV risk factors.

#### **Establish Leadership Academies**

To build the Hispanic Immigrant community's advocacy capacity and policy literacy, strengthening their role in critical policy shifts for testing, access and prevention.

#### **Develop Dynamic, Integrated Task Forces**

To foster an open dialogue between Hispanic Immigrant community members and health/social service providers, creating integrated task forces to shape policy recommendations.

#### **Embrace Community-based Prevention**

To initiate unique, on-going community prevention campaigns that target local objectives and trusted venues (churches, schools, youth, labor organizations, etc.) versus emphasis on annual national days of action.

*Hear the VIA Voices:*

View the *VIA* Multi-media Video

<http://www.youtube.com/user/TheRWHPorg?feature=mhum>

To receive free, bi-monthly *VIA* InSite Bulletins, contact us at: <http://www.via.rwhp.org/>

Stay informed: [www.ViaBlog.net](http://www.ViaBlog.net)

## Undercurrents Impeding HIV Prevention/Testing

An undercurrent of fear has created serious barriers to seeking assistance and making informed decisions. Whether documented or not, racial profiling and the potential separation by deportation of undocumented family or friends, keeps many on edge.

Fear of being targeted by law enforcement, combined with the emerging state laws and federal agreements, impedes the accessing of HIV prevention and testing services, regardless of legal status.<sup>7</sup> This fear has been heightened by reported cases of immigration actions at health/social service facilities.<sup>8</sup>

Anti-Immigrant state laws, such as Arizona's SB1070, are an example of a stringent state immigration laws intended to identify, prosecute, and deport undocumented immigrants. Presently, in the Southern United States, there are six proposed copycat laws in the works. Such laws depend on racial profiling, under the cloak of "reasonable suspicion"<sup>9</sup>.

*Immigration and Customs Enforcement's* (ICE) 287(g) agreements deputize county sheriffs as Immigration officials to investigate, apprehend and/or detain deportable immigrants.<sup>10</sup> For immigrants, this is seen as free reign for deputies to stop, interrogate and charge people as they go about their daily activities (work, school, daycare, doctor, etc.).

The focus on racial profiling from these proposed bills, with potential harassment of legal residents and citizens,<sup>11</sup> as well as the undocumented, creates a level of insecurity for people of color and also reduces their trust in the police.<sup>12</sup>

The present political atmosphere has the potential to jeopardize not only the health of Hispanic Immigrants, but in the long run, U.S. communities as well.

### Citations

- 1) CDC, 2010; 2) Human Rights Watch, 2010; 3) CDC, 2007; 4) United Health Foundation, 2009; 5) RWHP, 2010; 6) A Positive Life; 7) Kretsedemas, 2008; 8) Walton, 2009; 9) Archibold, 2010; 10) Immigration and Customs Enforcement, 2011; 11) Lopez & Minushkin, 2008; 12) Lopez, & Livingston, 2008.

Full citations at <http://www.via.rwhp.org/citations.html>