

HIT HARD



San Diego County Hispanics and
Latinos have been disproportionately
impacted by COVID-19



By Ekaterina Pechenkina

Photos provided by The Chicano Federation

In San Diego County, where the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases are higher than ever before, there is clear evidence which communities are being disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.

The virus has exposed racial, healthcare and housing disparities that have existed for generations and have left the Latino community more predisposed and vulnerable to COVID-19.

This was the finding in a report released by The Chicano Federation in September that revealed serious and systemic barriers to preventing Hispanic communities from undergoing COVID-19 testing and engaging in contact tracing efforts in San Diego County.

In many Latino communities, trust in local and federal government remains low and the information given out has been confusing or unhelpful.

Latino employees are overrepresented in essential workforce services, such as cleaning, grocery and childcare services.

While the Latino community makes up 34% of the county's population, it has 57.6% of all confirmed positive COVID-19 cases.

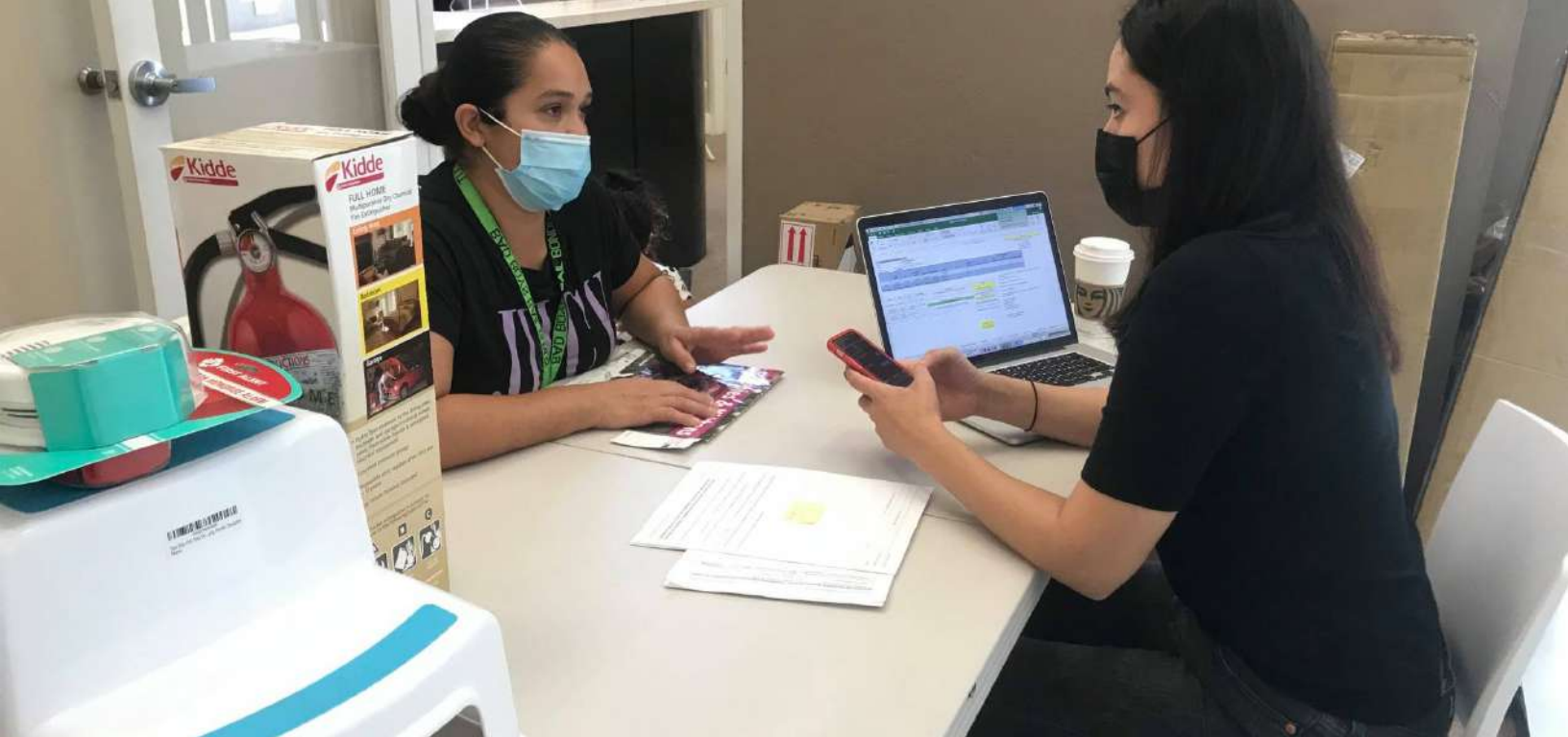
Source: San Diego County

Nancy Maldonado, president and chief executive officer of The Chicano Federation of San Diego County, stressed the importance of helping undocumented families, as their stories stand out among those impacted by the pandemic.

"It comes with an additional layer of fear – not just the fear of contracting the virus and not knowing how it is going to affect them," she said. "But the fear of not being able to seek medical treatment because of the possible repercussions that that can have."

Maldonado pointed out the effort made by the county and the State of California in the last few months.

"(They) have done a better job of translating the information and making it accessible in Spanish," Maldonado said.



"We need to start putting in systems that are going to help our community, because if not, we are going to end up with more people who are homeless, more people lose their homes. It is going to be devastating if we do not have a safety plan in place."

-Nancy Maldonado



She mentioned that San Diego County made the right decision to contract with community-based organizations so that they can continue to do the work in the community.

"Even though we have seen some positive results, as the infection rate has declined, it is still high and concerning," Maldonado said.

Maldonado said no one can let their guard down, especially during the holidays, even though she knows people have "COVID fatigue." The Federation continues to remind the community to not gather with people outside of their household.

But that's not easy, especially for those struggling financially.

"(People) are going to continue working if that is what they need to do to feed their families," she said.

For that reason, Maldonado said the officials throughout the region need to start planning for the fallout from the pandemic now.

"The effects are going to be far greater than any of us anticipate," she said. "We need to start putting in systems that are going to help our community, because if not, we are going to end up with more people who are homeless, more people lose their homes. It is going to be devastating if we do not have a safety plan in place."



Student Health Clinic Director Dotti Cordell at a recent Hunger Action Day at San Diego City College. San Diego City College photo

At San Diego City College, 50% of students identify as Latinx, according to the demographic data from last spring.

Since the pandemic started, Student Health Clinic Director Dotti Cordell has been very concerned about how COVID-19 would affect all students, and particularly students of color, as she knew these were communities that already carried a heavy burden of lack of health care and financial insecurity.

Cordell said that despite being able to conduct a survey among students, City College can anticipate that their Latino students are being impacted just as much as others of the same community in the county and in the state.

"This is as much concern to myself and to all of the faculty and leadership at City College," said Cordell, who has been at San Diego City College since 2001. "We know that we need to address this, and this is a very high priority."

Cordell said most students are not ready to trust and take the vaccine when it becomes available.

"We have to establish trust between communities of color and other marginalized groups and western health care system that has discriminated against them," Cordell said. "With specific to COVID, we need to explain what the vaccine is and build trust after it has been established safe. We encounter that minority communities do not trust flu shots in a regular season."

Cordell reminds students of the importance of wearing masks and social distancing, having connections with support groups, and following the evidence-based scientific information, including the guidance from Centers for Disease and Control Prevention and World Health Organization.

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-Dotti Cordell