



# US Hispanics and COVID-19

## Spanish-language Outreach & Crisis Communications

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\*Images by NBC News & Grist

Hispanic Communications Network (HCN) has 20 years of experience conducting and measuring social marketing, PR and communications solutions for federal agencies including CDC, NIH and USDA. HCN is also the largest provider of Spanish-language public interest media in the US. Through its **La Red Hispana** multimedia networks, the Spanish-speaking public relies on HCN's trusted voices via radio, digital, social media, print and mobile platforms with a weekly measured audience of 8 million Spanish speakers.

### Table of Contents:

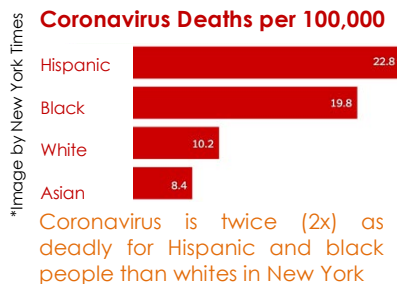
Executive Summary.....	p2
COVID-19 Direct Risks + Exposures Unique to US Hispanics.....	p3
Communications Solutions.....	p7
Testimonials by La Red Hispana Media Affiliates.....	p8
Appendix: A - Additional COVID-19 Challenges B - HCN Credentials and Capabilities	

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the US is experiencing the largest health crisis in over a century. Every person in the US – regardless of culture, preferred language or legal status – needs to be reached, engaged and cared for to stop the virus.

Public and private agencies must make quick decisions on how to engage diverse US populations in unified lifesaving response efforts. When considering how to best use multimedia health outreach for COVID-19, **in-culture and in-language communications delivered via trusted voices and regularly consumed media channels will be key to engaging Spanish-speaking communities.**

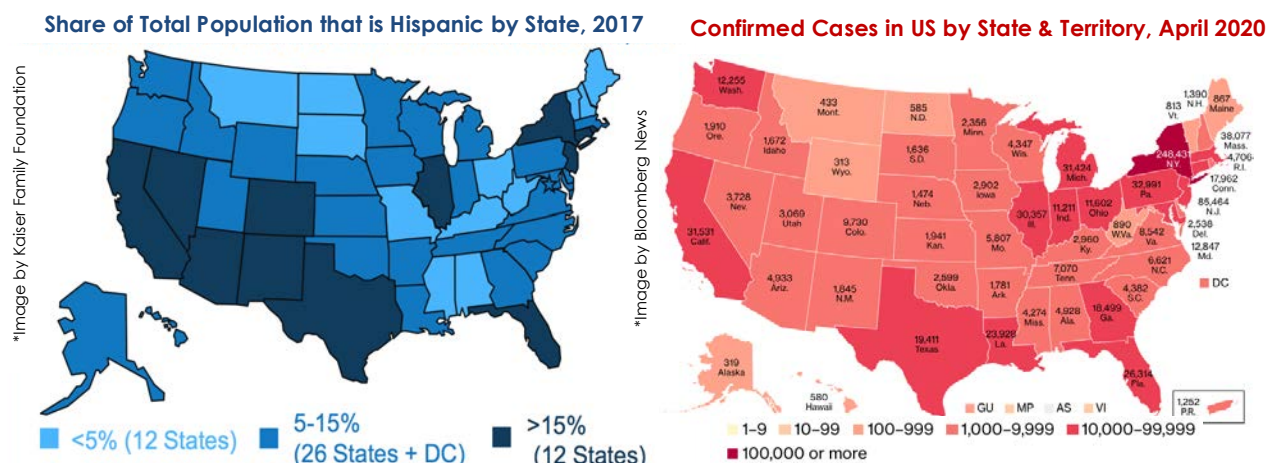
Of the nation's 60 million Hispanics, 75% speak Spanish at home. Yet Spanish-speakers remain under-informed with limited to no in-language resources regarding health and safety precautions to slow the spread of COVID-19. Clear



and concise cultural communications are urgently needed to dispel contradictory and even fraudulent misinformation. This is critical considering 1) Hispanic populations primarily live in states reporting elevated case volumes, and 2) together with black people, **Hispanics are experiencing disproportionately high rates of coronavirus cases and deaths across the US<sup>1</sup>.**

This brief illustrates unique, unmet challenges that place US Spanish-speaking communities at very high risk by both the coronavirus (direct risks) and the pandemic response itself (exacerbated vulnerabilities). The final section offers topline solutions (page 7) to address these challenges based on HCN's 20+ years of proven multimedia health marketing and outreach experience to successfully educate and engage bilingual and Spanish-dominant populations in crisis communications.

Hispanic populations primarily live in states with high incidence of COVID-19



## COVID-19 Direct Risks and Exposures Unique to US Hispanics

US Hispanics are disproportionately affected by chronic diseases, placing them at greater risk of medical complications and fatalities related to COVID-19

US Hispanics have a disproportionate prevalence of high-risk medical conditions due to complex determinants and inequities, including lack of access to quality healthcare, housing, education and poverty. There is a clear need to ensure COVID-19 communications adequately reach high-risk Spanish-speaking populations via popular broadcast, digital and social media platforms with critical life-saving information<sup>2</sup>.

Risk Factors	Hispanics	NHWs
Uninsured	25%	8%
Poverty	21%	9%

**Diabetes:** US Hispanics are 1.7 times more likely to have diabetes compared to non-Hispanic whites (NHWs). Adults have more than double (2.12x) the type 2 diabetes rate (17% Hispanics versus 8% NHWs), and twice (2x) the death rate<sup>3</sup>.

**Obesity:** US Hispanics are 1.23 times more likely to be obese than NHWs. 80% of Hispanic women are overweight or obese versus 64% of NHW women<sup>4</sup>.

**Chronic Lung Disease: Asthma** is disproportionately prevalent among certain Hispanic subgroups (Puerto Ricans 15.7%) compared to NHWs (7.5%). Among Hispanic children, mortality rates are double (2x) those of NHWs. **Smoking** rates are also high among specific subgroups (Puerto Ricans 40% and Cubans 31%) versus NHWs (16%)<sup>5</sup>.

**Immunocompromised: Cancer** is the leading cause of death among US Hispanics (2nd leading cause for NHWs). 30% of Hispanics are diagnosed with cancer within their lifetime. **Lupus** rates among Latina women are nearly triple (3x) those of NHW women. Latinx **HIV** diagnoses are three times (3x) higher than NHWs<sup>6</sup>.

**Heart Conditions:** Heart disease is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of death among US Hispanics. Coronary heart disease, hypertension and high blood pressure prevalence levels are nearly equal to those of NHWs. 49% of Hispanic males and 43% of females have cardiovascular disease. Nearly 70% of Mexican-American adults have high blood pressure, with 24% cases poorly controlled<sup>7</sup>.

**Liver Disease:** Hispanics have chronic liver disease at twice (2x) the rate of NHWs, and are 1.6 and 1.8 times more likely to die respectively from liver and inflammatory bowel disease (IBD) than NHWs<sup>8</sup>.

**Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD):** Hispanics are 1.5 times more likely to have kidney failure compared to other Americans. The prevalence rate of end-stage renal disease is almost 50% higher than NHWs due to faster CKD progression<sup>9</sup>.

**Ages 65+:** Aging Hispanics are more likely than NHWs to have chronic health conditions, including diabetes and hypertension<sup>10</sup>.

As the largest uninsured group in the US, many Hispanics lack access to healthcare for COVID-19 medical consultations, testing and treatment

Studies show the rate of uninsured Hispanics is nearly 2.5 times higher than for NHWs. While persons with COVID-19 symptoms are urged to call their doctor before seeking in-person medical attention, this is not an option for Hispanics lacking health insurance, as they have no primary care physician and often rely on the emergency department for health interventions. Additionally, a significant number of low-income Hispanics do not own video conferencing devices, limiting their ability to access telemedicine and medical interpreters.

Many limited English proficiency (LEP) Hispanics turn to their preferred Spanish-language broadcast and online platforms for health guidance. This is why dissemination of radio and TV PSAs, videos, infographics and digital materials, as well as media tours featuring Spanish-proficient subject matter experts (SMEs), are critical to achieve positive behavior change amidst the pandemic response.



In addition to physicians and nurses, informal community-based healthcare workers, such as Promotores de Salud and Ventanillas de Salud, are relied upon by under-/uninsured Hispanics for medical support. These trusted health educators should be engaged in all strategies, with patient education toolkits to promote prevention, testing and treatment to communities they intimately know + serve.

Hispanic laborers comprise a major segment of the “essential” US workforce, with broad economic and health impacts if not protected under COVID-19

Spanish-speaking laborers represent a significant portion of the US workforce risking their lives – and without worker protections. Many have little to no job security if they fall sick or become unable to work. Most remain ineligible for essential benefits to help them stay home if infected. Even if symptomatic, wage workers, including persons 65+ and with chronic diseases, will continue going to work to avoid missing a day's pay or losing their job. One survey shows immigrants are scared about their economic situation (95%) more than the coronavirus (73%). This lack of job security and paid sick leave places entire work groups and entire communities at risk<sup>11</sup>.

**AGRICULTURE & FOOD INDUSTRY WORKERS** are “essential” by decree of the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS). Over 80% are Spanish-speaking. The majority are without worker protections or paid sick leave to help them stay home if infected. The CARES Act failed to provide protections for these vulnerable workers. Should these “essential” workforces fall ill to coronavirus outbreaks and become unable to work, **US food supply will take a direct hit.**



Hispanics in the food industry, including farmworkers, truck drivers, processing plant workers and grocery store employees, are particularly at-risk without additional protective equipment, training, or regulations to prevent transmission and support paid sick leave.



Limited protections for farmworkers

Close proximity working conditions for farmworkers and food packing plants make “social distancing” nearly impossible – and by default, present perfect settings for coronavirus transmission – leading to increasing food packing plant closures by the day.



Processing plants are shutting down due to high COVID-19 transmission and death rates, particularly among Hispanic, black + immigrant employees

A customized strategy combining occupational safety and COVID-19 prevention communications in Spanish via radio, digital and social media are necessary to protect not only the health and safety of essential food industry workforces, but the entire US food supply chain during the pandemic.



In-language information is required to protect assisted living Spanish-speaking staff and aging residents they serve

A customized outreach approach is recommended for Spanish-speaking caregivers, sanitation and food preparation staff at assisted living and retirement homes as well. These workers are similarly in need of in-language resources to protect themselves and highly vulnerable residents ages 65+.

Fear prevents many non-citizens, including lawful permanent residents, from accessing critical health services and public programs under COVID-19

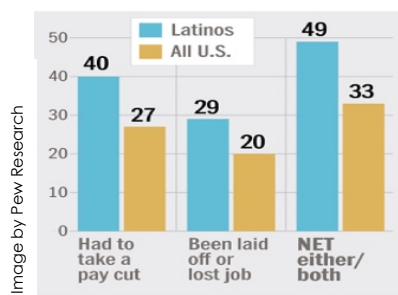
A significant portion of US Hispanics in “mixed status households”, where citizens, lawful permanent residents (LPRs) and persons without documentation live under the same roof. These families are reluctant to access COVID-19 testing or medical treatment for fear of household members being reported to DHS Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and potentially deported. Fear of accessing public health services causes these families to present an extreme risk as the disease vectors <sup>12</sup>.

Due to recent changes to the Public Charge rule, even lawful permanent residents are afraid to enroll in Medicaid programs, as participation may jeopardize their current extension of stay or future eligibility for naturalization. News reports increasingly show cases of persons dying from the virus without seeking medical help due to legal status <sup>13</sup>.

These cases are rising despite statements by DHS US Customs and Immigration Services (USCIS) explaining that seeking “medical treatment or preventative services for symptoms that resemble COVID-19... will not negatively affect any alien as part of a future Public Charge analysis”. To resonate most effectively with non-citizens and mixed status households, these messages clarifying that COVID-related medical services have safe haven must be delivered by trusted voices on channels regularly relied upon by Spanish-speaking communities<sup>14</sup>.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) Hispanic communities are further at-risk and left out of "Flattening the Curve" efforts, which are compromised due to sparse Spanish-language or bilingual COVID-19 information and resources

Spanish-speakers do not have reliable access to in-language, up-to-date COVID-19 information and resources. This is especially concerning as 30% of US Hispanics (18 million people) are not fluent or able to understand English-language outreach. Hispanic consumers' ability to receive updates in Spanish directly influences the success of behavioral engagement required for transmission prevention efforts.



50% of Hispanics have taken a pay cut or lost a job, forcing many to decide between COVID response efforts vs basic needs

Hispanic households are financially hard-hit by the pandemic more than other Americans, which can further hinder response efforts. This is particularly true of immigrant wage workers who are not eligible for unemployment benefits or federal stimulus checks. Without pay, symptomatic persons may avoid medical treatment as they are unable to afford health services. Immediate food and shelter requirements may also take priority over response efforts, such as social distancing and hygiene, which become secondary priorities over basic needs<sup>15</sup>.

Many immigrant and mixed status households are both multi-generational, with family members 65+, and overcrowded, where an entire family of 4-8 people can reside in one room with access to only one restroom. These families must be informed about best approaches to achieve required social distancing in overcrowded living conditions. This is particularly detrimental for cohabitants who have underlying medical conditions and/or are vulnerable to infection due to age.



Information on social distancing for overcrowded multi-generational housing must be addressed in-language

Federal, state and local government agencies are encouraged to increase the amount of Spanish-language COVID-19 resources to match those published in English. Working with influencers trusted by Spanish-speaking communities to deliver these messages on popular digital, social media and mobile platforms is also highly recommended as many are reluctant to access government portals.

Bilingual provider-patient communications tools for COVID-19 should also be prepared for healthcare providers on the front lines treating Spanish-dominant patients in hospitals, federally qualified health clinics (FQHCs) and Veterans Affairs Medical Centers and Services, to enhance efficacy of interactions.

## RECOMMENDED SOLUTIONS: Cultural Communications Strategies

Tens of millions of Spanish-speaking households rely on Spanish-language radio, TV, social media and digital outlets for updates on the coronavirus. Since the onset of COVID-19 in the US, Hispanic Communications Network (HCN) has been conducting informal surveys with its media affiliates. The majority of Hispanic broadcasters have expressed willingness to book interviews and place PSAs, ads and materials around the clock.

Based on HCN's 20+ years of experience, the most impactful communications efforts around crisis response and health education include the components outlined below. Each point is vital and applicable to the current COVID-19 pandemic in order to reach and engage Spanish-speaking consumers, stakeholders and health providers to partake in lifesaving response efforts.

- **Culturally driven strategies** to deliver urgent messages directly to Spanish-preferring consumers in their homes, vehicles and workplace
- **Original cultural executions for messaging and creative** (versus translations) to resonate with Hispanic consumers and speak to the heart
- **Trusted Latinx voices**, influencers and celebrities to deliver information, endorse resources and promote calls to action
- **Design and production of Spanish-language multimedia materials** for radio, TV, digital + social media (PSAs, videos, banners, infographics, podcasts, etc)
- **Distribution and guaranteed placement** via HCN's *La Red Hispana* Spanish-language national multimedia networks scalable to reach Hispanic urban, mid-sized and rural markets, with 24- to 48-hour rapid response capacities
  - **Daily and weekly radio programming** on over 125 Spanish-language radio stations in 60+ urban, mid-sized and rural US Hispanic markets
  - **Digital media platforms** including HCN's consumer-facing LaRedHispana.org website and mobile app
  - **Social media channels** including 6 channels managed by HCN under its La Red Hispana brand and personalities



- **Media tours / earned media / PR** featuring Spanish-proficient subject matter experts via HCN's existing relationships with Spanish-language media outlets
- **Hispanic Stakeholder engagement** via HCN's existing relationships with:
  - National, regional and local **community and faith based organizations**
  - **Promotores de salud** to provide patient education toolkits and trainings to ensure COVID-19 messages reach Spanish-speakers outside the healthcare system via trusted health educators in local communities
  - **Ventanillas de Salud** networks to provide digital video content serving over 2 million annually via HCN's programming of Ventanillas de Salud dedicated closed circuit TV, digital and social media channels

### TESTIMONIALS: HCN's *La Red Hispana* Media Affiliates on COVID-19

"Our audience is one of the most vulnerable groups in the country and needs information during difficult times. Spanish-language media is the primary source of information for many in our audiences. Those of us in the broadcast industry rely on sources like the content we receive from *La Red Hispana*. It is crucial for us to receive the latest content in Spanish from government institutions as it is being distributed to the general English-speaking public".



- Denise Coleman, Norsan Media

Markets: Charlotte, Jacksonville, Greensboro, Wilmington, Charleston, Columbia

"As a Spanish-language communications service, we greatly need to get the word out to our listeners, and avoid miscommunication in transferring from English to Spanish. Our audiences should consume up-to-date material from legit sources, not from word of mouth, which I believe is the cause of much chaos within our community. We appreciate the prompt response from *La Red Hispana*, who have been on top providing material for our Spanish speaking audiences".

- Irma Covarrubias, Entravision Network

Markets: Los Angeles, San Diego, Las Vegas, Palm Springs, Yuma-El Centro, Sacramento-Stockton-Modesto, Monterey-Salinas, Santa Barbara, Fresno-Visalia, San Francisco-Oakland, Chico-Redding, Albuquerque-Santa Fe



"During these times, I believe we shouldn't have to call for information and search for materials; they should be sent to all Hispanic media outlets. I have to do all the work to get the information. *La Red Hispana* does an excellent job providing us information for our listeners on a national level. We also need information in Spanish on local levels, as our listeners call to ask where can they go and what can they do. Each government agency should have Spanish-language media outreach".

- Belia Paz, Aero Media

Markets: Salt Lake City, Boise





## APPENDIX A: EXACERBATED VULNERABILITIES

### Pandemic Response Adverse Effects on Spanish-speaking Communities

COVID-19 Related Challenges	Communications Solutions
<p><b>Fear of Accessing Public Benefits Due to Public Charge Rule.</b></p> <p>Eligible Hispanic families are not participating in benefits programs due to the Public Charge Rule, including Medicaid, housing programs and food stamps (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program - SNAP), due to fear of losing current/future legal status.</p>	<p>With high numbers of layoffs and pay reductions, Spanish-language marketing outreach is necessary to clarify which services will not have a negative impact if accessed with proper documentation during the pandemic.</p>  <p>HCN's national call-in show helps guide Spanish-speakers on navigating life in the US under COVID-19</p>
<p><b>Limited to No Childcare for Non-Remote Work Families.</b></p> <p>With school closures and no means to afford childcare, working parents and guardians unable to work remotely are resigned to leave their children at home unsupervised, take them to work, or leave them in vehicles. Few have the time or knowledge of how to homeschool their children<sup>16</sup>.</p>	<p>Practical tips on how to address the void of daycare and school, together with access to free bilingual online children's education resources, should be promoted to Spanish-speaking parents and family members during the lockdown.</p>  <p>*Image by The Post-Star</p> <p>Considering 5 in 6 US Hispanics do not have jobs setup for remote work, outreach is needed to connect Spanish-speaking parents with tips and free bilingual online education platforms</p>
<p><b>Domestic Violence.</b></p> <p>With three-quarters of the US population staying at home to prevent transmission, and 1-in-3 Latinas experiencing domestic violence (DV) in their lifetime, Hispanic cases of DV are assumed to be on the rise as victims are in "lockdown" with perpetual proximity to their abuser. DV hotlines are currently reporting that nearly 50% of calls are related to COVID-19<sup>17</sup>.</p>	<p>Considering immigrant women victims of domestic violence typically report their case at half the rate of other groups, customized media communications should target Spanish-dominant women, with immigrant women as a specific priority audience, to promote support and access to hotlines and resources during the pandemic.</p>  <p>HCN original domestic violence video production: A Través de Sus Ojos (Through Their Eyes)</p>

### Displaced Persons & Homelessness.

Facing eviction from being laid off and living under informal rental agreements, many Hispanic persons and families will be displaced. Tens to hundreds of thousands may setup camp in public lands, including National Forests, Grasslands and National Parks. This creates challenges to social distancing, hygiene and sanitation efforts. Wildland-urban interface, unmanaged recreation and wildfire prevention concerns will be exacerbated during this time.

Spanish-language media strategies are warranted to reach persons displaced or made homeless by the COVID-19 pandemic response. Public lands managers should also be trained and equipped with talking points and bilingual materials for use when encountering Spanish-dominant dwellers.



\*Image by  
Center for American Progress

Spanish-language communications strategies and staff trainings are required to address social distancing, hygiene and wildfire risks that increase with homeless encampments

### Mental Health and Substance Use.

More Latinos (24%) say the coronavirus has a “major impact” on their mental health compared to NHWs (17%) – with 28% reporting “high psychological distress”, which has a direct connection to lower-income status. Suicide rates are also a concern, as Latina teens have a particularly high suicide rate with 1-in-7 US Hispanic girls attempting suicide – almost double the rate of NHW young females<sup>18</sup>.

Culturally driven mental health and substance use communications are critical during this time to address social isolation, major life changes, job loss, access to healthcare, family dynamics, language barriers and poverty.



HCN's influencer psychologists, Dra. Isabel and Dr. Eduardo López-Navarro, work with sponsors to endorse educational talking points, resources and calls to action on their national mental health call-in shows

### Hispanic-Owned Businesses.

As of June 2019, the US had 4.65 million Hispanic-owned companies, representing 14% all US businesses<sup>19</sup>.

Spanish-prefering small business owners must also be informed of the CARES Act assistance offered to maintain their employees, healthcare plans and operations during the pandemic.



Hispanic business owners grew 34% in the past 10 years; this group of new entrepreneurs must be reached and informed about relief assistance

### Taxes.

Earnings of Hispanic households (HHHs) are major contributors to US tax revenues. In 2017, HHHs earned \$1 trillion and paid \$252.2 billion in taxes. In 2015, foreign-born HHHs had a spending power of \$322.1 billion<sup>20</sup>.

Spanish-language outreach via media and stakeholder engagement is critical to inform tax payers about the July 15 filing extension.<sup>21</sup>

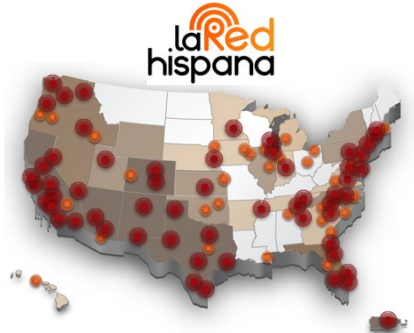


HCN original IRS-EITC video production

## APPENDIX B: Hispanic Communications Network

HCN is a full-service social marketing and communications agency delivering culturally driven - not translations driven - multimedia strategies via *comunicación con corazón*.

Mission-driven government, nonprofit, foundation and CSR clients rely on HCN to address social determinants + health equity in ways that improve quality of life for US Hispanics.



HCN's National Radio Network



**Built-in Distribution:** HCN offers guaranteed placement via its *La Red Hispana* national multimedia networks, where HCN serves as the largest producer and syndicator of educational and informational Spanish-language media content in the US. Currently, HCN's content reaches 8 million Latinx consumers weekly in urban, mid-size and rural Hispanic markets nationwide.

**La Red Hispana Multimedia Networks:** Daily and weekly programming via 125+ Spanish-language radio affiliates, as well as digital, social media and mobile channels.

**Trusted Influencers and Hispanic Celebrities:** Lend high visibility and credibility to endorse health campaigns and inspire behavior change among priority audiences.

**HCN Capabilities:** Full-Service Social Impact Marketing and Communications • Branding • In-House Creative + Production • Digital • Traditional • Social Media • PR & Media Relations • Distribution via La Red Hispana National Multimedia Networks • Trusted Influencers + Celebrities • Impact Evaluation • Affinity Marketing • Hispanic Stakeholder + Health Provider Engagement • Rapid Response

 José López Zamorano  
Immigration & Adjusting to Life in the US

 Dra Isabel, PhD  
Psychology, Relationships, Lifestyle

 Pedro Biaggi  
Entertainment, Community Issues

 Dr Pablo Rodríguez, MD, OB/GYN  
Reproductive Health

 Isabel Nieves  
Environment, Climate & Health

 Dr Eduardo López Navarro  
Life Coach, Mental Health, LGBTQ

La Red Hispana Influencers

 **Contract Holder**  
GS-23F-0307M

### HCN Sponsors



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CREATIVE & MARKETING

# SERVICES

<sup>1</sup> [New York Times](#); [Boston Globe](#);  
[The Gazette \(Iowa\)](#)

<sup>2</sup> [HHS Office of Minority Health](#);  
[Kaiser Family Foundation](#)

<sup>3</sup> [HHS Office of Minority Health](#); [CDC](#)

<sup>4</sup> [HHS Office of Minority Health](#); [CDC](#)

<sup>5</sup> [American Lung Association](#)

<sup>6</sup> [NIH National Library of Medicine](#);  
[American Cancer Society](#);

[Contagion](#); [Lupus Foundation of America](#)

<sup>7</sup> [American Heart Association](#); [CDC](#)

<sup>8</sup> [USA Today](#); [HHS Office of Minority Health](#)

<sup>9</sup> [National Kidney Foundation](#)

<sup>10</sup> [HHS Administration for Community Living](#); [CDC](#)

<sup>11</sup> [USA Today](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Pew Research](#); [The New York Times](#)

<sup>13</sup> [Fox News Washington DC](#)

<sup>14</sup> [The New York Times](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Pew Research](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Civil Eats](#); [CBS News](#)

<sup>17</sup> [The Guardian](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Kaiser Family Foundation](#);

[HHS Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration \(SAMHSA\)](#)

<sup>19</sup> [New York Post](#); [USA Today](#)

<sup>20</sup> [New American Economy](#)

NATIONAL MEDIA

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