

Binational Health Week: A Strategy For Making Migrant/Immigrant Health a Policy Priority

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Abstract

This paper presents an overview of the University of California, California-Mexico Health Initiative, a health promotion program targeting low-income, immigrant/migrant Latino community that lacks access to health care coverage or immigration status.

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Background

The California-Mexico Health Initiative (CMHI), California Policy Research Center, University of California Office of the President coordinates Binational Health Week (BHW). It is a collaborative effort among academic partners, community-based organizations, community health centers, and public health departments in both countries.

Held simultaneously with Mexico's National Health Week III, BHW will take place annually in selected regions of California and in Mexican states with high international migratory patterns. Although this event will benefit Latinos regardless of their national origin, BHW targets the low-income, immigrant/migrant Latino community that lacks access to health care. Attendance at BHW events benefits the participant with on-site care from mobile clinics, and increases public awareness, understanding, and knowledge of services that are available to them at the local level — despite their health care coverage or immigration status.

BHW has proved to be a successful strategy to engage both Californian and Mexican leaders to address migrant/immigrant health as a matter of attention; an opportunity for cooperative

planning; and an entry to existing health services for Mexican-origin communities statewide.

CMHI will coordinate place-based activities of regional coordinators in selected areas. Each coordinator will convene a regional task force of key local stakeholders from the California Department of Health Services, the Mexican consulate, community clinics, hometown associations, and community-based organizations to plan and organize local activities. CMHI will convene multi-agency task forces to develop fundraising, mobilize community networks for health purposes, provide direct services, conduct health promotion activities, distribute health education and promotion materials, and increase enrollment in public health-insurance programs.

Mexico, through the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, will co-sponsor inaugural events, coordinate federal, state, and local representatives, including presidential administration officials, state governors, and secretaries of health, to participate in binational forums and kick-off events. The Mexican press will cover binational forums. Mexico will co-sponsor the graphic design of the covers for various CMHI publications (e.g., Bilingual

Guide to Insurance Programs, Fact Sheets on the Mexican Population in California) distributed during BHW. Donation of hundreds of health-related brochures for distribution through the Mexican Consulates in California will make it possible to provide culturally-specific educational materials to local BHW coordinators and task force members.

Expected Outcomes

- Increased promotion and reinforcement of healthy behaviors among migrant/immigrant families;
- Increase in California's health-promotion activities specifically targeting migrant/immigrant families to reinforce the efforts of the Mexican National Health Week crusades;
- Increased awareness and understanding among migrant/immigrant families of high-risk factors affecting their health;
- Increased collaborative projects with community-based organizations, county and community clinics in providing outreach and health-promotion activities to selected migrant/immigrant communities;
- Increased number of migrant/immigrant families with information on health resources and services available in selected California counties;
- Increased dissemination of research findings on immigrant health issues;
- Increased visibility of migrant/immigrant communities.

Methods

Culturally-specific media campaigns, health promotion activities, health screening, academic and research forums are held to make the health

of migrants/immigrants of Mexican-origin a policy priority. The statewide and binational mobilization of volunteers and health officials create an impetus for focus on migrant/immigrant health at a local and binational level.

Results

In BHW 2002, 12 California counties participated to provide 167 health-related events at 123 sites ([Video 1](#) Health with Dignity / Salud con Dignidad). There were 280 participating agencies. More than 1,000 people joined efforts in organizing the week's events and providing services. Over the course of the week more than 24,000 people received approximately 51,000 health-related interventions. There were 47 press articles, 60 radio announcements, and daily television coverage mainly through the Spanish broadcasting stations. Local coordinators estimated that more than half a million people received health-related media messages.

Conclusions

BHW has created a means for political dialogue about services and programs to improve the quality of life of Mexican-origin communities. Dialogue between immigrants of Mexican origin, Mexican-Americans, Chicanos, Latino legislators in California, federal and state representatives of both countries, and funding agencies has been enhanced through community-focused activities and research and academic forums. There is growing interest in establishing binational commitments to increase available resources that will not be eliminated by other political priorities.

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