

Latinos in Georgia: A Closer Look

According to 2004 U.S. Census estimates, Georgia has a population of 8,581,489 persons, 6.7% of whom are Latino.^{1*} In the past 15 years, Georgia experienced an increase of more than 300% in the number of Latinos calling the state home,² with most of the growth occurring in the past ten years.³ As a result, Georgia now has the eleventh-largest Latino population in the country.⁴

This statistical brief focuses on demographic, social, health, and other indicators, presenting a comprehensive portrait of Latinos in Georgia. This information is relevant for policy-makers, community-based organizations, and those in

the private sector, since Latinos are increasingly becoming an important part of Georgia's economy and social fabric and will play an integral role in its future development.

Population Highlights

State of Georgia

- As of 2004, Georgia had the third-fastest-growing Latino population of any state.⁵
- Georgia ranks 12th in the percentage of people born in Latin America.⁶
- As Figure 1 shows, about half of Hispanics in Georgia are U.S. citizens, either by birth or naturalization, and

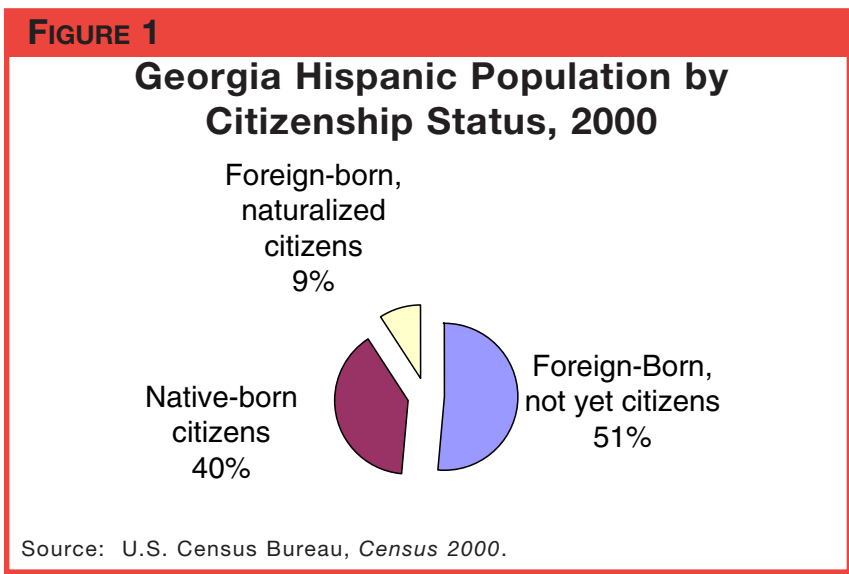
slightly more than half of the Hispanic population of Georgia was born outside of the U.S.⁷

- The number of Hispanic births in Georgia grew by 643%, from 2,263 in 1990 to 16,819 in 2002.⁸
- Northeast Georgia's Latino population grew 348% between 1990 and 2000.⁹
- The median age of Georgia's Latino population is 25.6 years, reflecting closely the median age of all Hispanics in the U.S., as shown in Table 1. Moreover, as Figure 2 shows, three in five (61.9%) Hispanics in Georgia are 29 years old or younger.

* This brief was prepared by Natalie Hernandez, Project Coordinator, and Liany Elba Arroyo, Senior Program Manager. In addition, Lindsay Daniels, Project Associate, provided data assistance; Sonia M. Pérez, Vice President of Research and Strategic Initiatives, and Jennifer Kadis, Director of Quality Control, edited the brief and prepared it for publication; and Rosemary Aguilar, Director of the Design & Publications Unit, designed the brief. The preparation of this document was made possible by the support of the Healthcare Georgia Foundation, although the authors and NCLR are solely responsible for its content. Permission to reproduce and distribute this information is granted as long as appropriate credit is given to NCLR.

** The terms "Latino" and "Hispanic" are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to identify persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, and Spanish descent; they may be of any race.

- Similar to the national Hispanic profile, Latinos of Mexican descent are the largest Hispanic subgroup (67.8%) in Georgia, followed by those of Puerto Rican descent (8%). If grouped together, Hispanics of Central American descent - which includes Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama - are the second-largest group (11%), as shown in Figure 3.



- Slightly more than half (52.9%) of Georgia's Latinos characterize themselves as not speaking English very well or at all, as shown in Table 3.

Metropolitan Statistical Areas

- As shown in Table 2, Dalton and Gainesville metropolitan statistical areas have the largest percentages of Hispanics in Georgia.

- Among the nation's 20 most populous metropolitan areas, Atlanta experienced the most rapid Hispanic growth rate.¹⁰

- One in 13 residents (7.7%) in metropolitan Atlanta is Hispanic.¹¹

- Of the metropolitan Atlanta counties, Gwinnett County has the largest number of Hispanics with 105,943 people,

or 15.3% of the county's population. Cobb County has 64,550 Latinos, followed by DeKalb County with 59,002, Fulton County with 56,968, and Clayton County with 28,500 Latinos. These five counties alone are home to more than half of the state's Latino population.¹²

TABLE 1

Hispanic Population in Georgia

	Population (2004) ¹³		Hispanic Percent of Population ¹⁴	Growth Rate (1990-2000) ¹⁵		Median Age (2003) ¹⁶	
	Total Population	Hispanic		Total Population	Hispanic	Total	Hispanic
United States	285,691,501	40,459,196	14.2%	13.2%	57.9%	36.0 years	26.2 years
Georgia	8,581,489	576,113	6.7%	26.4%	299.6%	33.8 years	25.6 years

Sources: U.S. Census Bureau, *2004 American Community Survey*; U.S. Census Bureau, *Census 2000*; U.S. Census Bureau, *2003 American Community Survey*. All percentages calculated by the National Council of La Raza.

TABLE 2

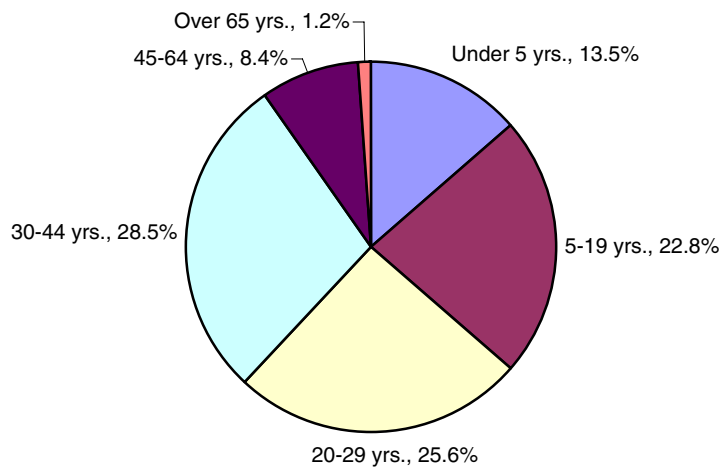
Georgia Metropolitan Statistical Areas by Hispanic Origin, 2003

City	Hispanic Population	Percent of Total Population
Gainesville	35,326	22.6
Dalton	25,476	20.0
Atlanta	353,011	7.7
Rome	6,044	6.5
Hinesville-Fort Stewart	4,466	6.4
Athens-Clarke County	9,564	5.6
Columbus	9,018	3.8
Valdosta	3,701	3.0
Warner Robins	3,551	2.9
Brunswick	2,581	2.7

Source: *Georgia Business and Economic Conditions, Still Growing*. Selig Center for Economic Growth, 1st Quarter 2005.

FIGURE 2

Georgia Hispanic Population, by Age: 2003



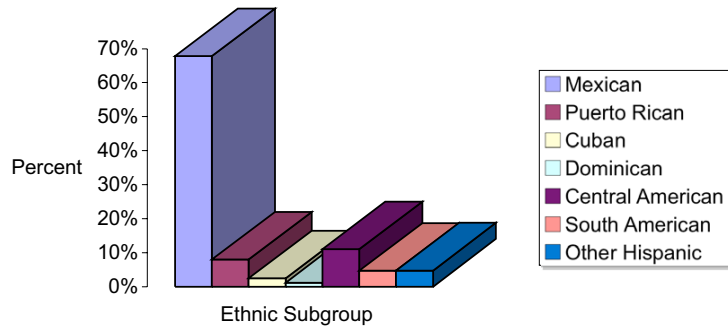
Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2003 American Community Survey.

Education

- About one in 12 students (7.8%) enrolled in the Georgia public school system in 2005 is Hispanic, as shown in Table 4.
- The most recent available data, as of spring 2001, show that three in five (61%) Hispanic students were classified as Limited English Proficient (LEP) by the Georgia Department of Education.¹⁸

FIGURE 3

Georgia Hispanic Population by Ethnic Subgroup, 2004



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2004 American Community Survey.

- On average, Hispanic students in Georgia do not test or graduate at the same level as other groups.¹⁹
- Less than half of Latino seniors graduate from high school as shown in Figure 4.²⁰

TABLE 3

Georgia Spanish-Speaking Population, 2004

English-Speaking Capacity	Percent of Spanish-Speaking Population (18-64 years) ¹⁷
Speak English "very well"	29.7%
Speak English "well"	17.4%
Speak English "not well"	31.9%
Speak English "not at all"	21%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. 2004 American Community Survey.

TABLE 4

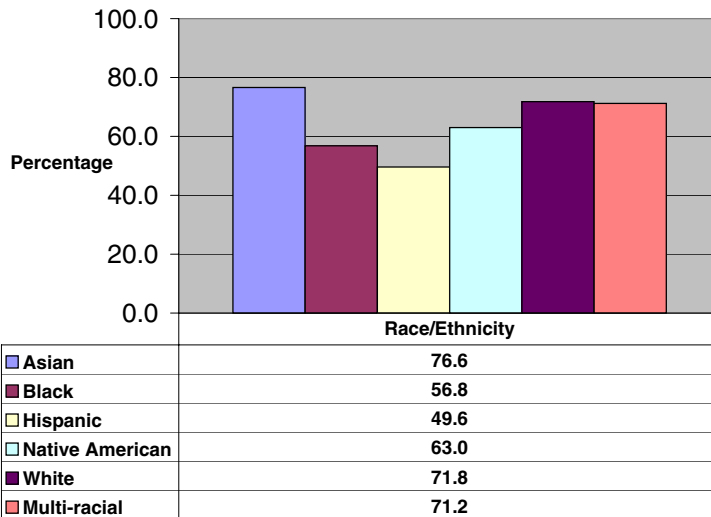
Hispanic Children Enrollment in Georgia Public Schools, (PK-12), 2005

	Total Children Enrolled (2005)	Hispanic Children Enrolled (2005)	Hispanic Proportion of Enrolled Children
Enrollment, Grades PK-12 ²¹	1,544,044	120,505	7.8%

Source: Georgia Department of Education, 2005, Enrollment by Gender, Race/Ethnicity and Grade (PK-12).

FIGURE 4

Georgia High School Graduation Rate - 2003-2004



Source: Georgia Department of Education, 2003-2004 Georgia Public Education Report Card.

Economic Characteristics

- Almost four in five Latinos (78.1%) in Georgia are working or looking for work, compared to two-thirds of the total Georgia population, as shown in Table 5.
- Despite a high labor force participation rate, Hispanics in Georgia are more likely than those in the total population to be poor (18.8% compared to 13.4%, respectively). The poverty rate of Latino children in Georgia is also higher than that of all children in Georgia, as shown in Table 6.
- In 2003, median household income in Georgia was lower for Hispanics (\$33,289) relative to median household income for all residents (\$44,037).²²
- Hispanic buying power in the state of Georgia grew faster than any other segment of the state's economy, rising 710% to \$10.9 billion in the past 14 years.²³
- Latinos in Georgia are also taking an active role in acquiring their own businesses. According to the Small Business Administration, of the 413,853 small business loans granted to firms in Georgia in 2002, 9,333 were to Hispanic-owned small businesses.²⁴
- While homeownership rates continue to climb both nationally and in the state, Latinos are significantly less likely to own a home than the general population, as shown in Table 7.

TABLE 5**Employment Status of Latinos in Georgia, 2004**

	Total Population	Hispanic
In labor force ²⁵	4,399,000	299,000
Participation rate	67.3%	78.1%
Unemployed	20,500	14,000
Unemployment rate	4.7%	4.6%

Source: U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. *2004 Annual Averages*.

TABLE 6**Poverty Among Latinos in Georgia, 2003**

	Total Population	Hispanic
Population below poverty level ²⁶	1,125,160	98,930
Percent of population below poverty	13.4%	18.8%
Population under 18 (children)	2,250,294	174,170
Children below poverty level	420,110	41,124
Percent of children below poverty	18.7%	23.6%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. *2003 American Community Survey*.

TABLE 7**Latino Homeownership in Georgia, 2003**

	Number of Homeowners	Percent of All Householders that are Homeowners	Number of Hispanic Homeowners	Percent of Hispanic Householders that are Homeowners	Hispanic Proportion of Total Homeowners
Owner-Occupied Household ²⁷	2,151,821	68.3%	54,436	40.4%	2.5%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. *2003 American Community Survey*.

Latino Health Status in Georgia

Risk Factors

- Chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes, are among the most prevalent and preventable diseases among Latinos in the United States. Although the leading cause of death in Georgia is unintentional injuries, Latinos in Georgia are at an increased risk for chronic diseases due to health-damaging behaviors such as tobacco use, lack of physical activity, and poor nutrition which they, particularly youth, are adopting as they acculturate to the American way of life. Table 8 shows the percentage of Hispanics with selected risk factors.
- More than one-quarter (29%) of Latino students grades 9 - 12 reported that in the past 30 days they rode one or more times in a car or other vehicle that was driven by someone who had been drinking alcohol, compared to 23% of Blacks and 24% of Whites.²⁸
- Among Latinos in Georgia in grades 9-12, 16% reported smoking a cigar in the past month compared to 11% of Blacks.²⁹
- According to the Georgia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, nearly seven in ten (69%) Latinos reported they were at risk for health problems related to being overweight, compared to 55% of Whites.³⁰
- Twenty-four percent of Latinos in Georgia self-report they are overweight or obese.³¹
- The Latina teen pregnancy rate* in Georgia is double the national Hispanic average. In Georgia, three in five (61%) of all Latina girls in Georgia become pregnant at least once before their 20th birthday, compared to about one in four (27%) of all girls in Georgia.³² For Latina girls between the ages of 15 and 19, one in six becomes pregnant. In some counties the number is even higher. For instance, in DeKalb, Gwinnett, and Clayton Counties, one in five Latinas between the ages of 15 and 19 becomes pregnant, and in Fulton County the number is even more alarming: one in four Latinas between the ages of 15-19 became pregnant in 2003.³³

* Rates are per 100,000 individuals and age-adjusted.

TABLE 8**Risk Factors that Contribute to Chronic Diseases**

	White	Black	Hispanic/Latino
Fair/Poor self-perceived health status (ages 18 and older) ³⁴	14.9%	17.1%	11.1%
Participation in physical activity (ages 18 and older) ³⁵	76.1%	70.1%	81.3%
Moderate physical activity in adolescents (students in grades 9-12) ³⁶	28%	22%	25%
Vigorous physical activity in adolescents (students in grades 9-12) ³⁷	64%	52%	60%
Television viewing (students in grades 9-12) ³⁸	72%	38%	54%
Consume less than five servings of fruits and vegetables per day (ages 18 and older) ³⁹	76.6%	79.6%	78.1%
High blood pressure (ages 18 and older) ⁴⁰	27.4%	31.3%	15.7%
Adults limited in any activities because of physical, mental, or emotional problems ⁴¹	20.8%	12.5%	13.1%
At risk for health problems related to being overweight (based on BMI) ⁴²	55.7%	66.7%	69.0%
Smoke cigarettes every day (ages 18 and older) ⁴³	16.2%	11.7%	7.8%
Cigarette smoking rate ⁴⁴	24.5	18.8	17.1

Sources: Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BFRSS) 2004; Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BFRSS) 2003; Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BFRSS) 2002; Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation: Georgia: Health Status; Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System (YRBSS) 2002.

Causes of Death

- The mortality rate for Latinos in Georgia is lower than the mortality rate for all other

racial groups in Georgia, the southern U.S., and the country as a whole (see Table 9). However, Hispanics suffer from many diseases at

disproportionate rates and tend to be diagnosed with illnesses at later stages of the disease process.

TABLE 9**Mortality Rates (All Causes), 2000⁴⁵**

	Total Population	White	African American	Asian	Hispanic
United States	870.4	849.8	1126.6	516.5	670.1
Southern United States	884.7	838.7	1138.4	435.3	603.5
Georgia	965.7	915.3	1148.6	530.8	441.6

Source: *National Vital Statistics System-Mortality (NVSS-M) 2000*, CDC, NCHS. Rates are reported per 100,000 individuals (NCHS).

■ In 2004, the leading cause of death for all U.S. Hispanics - similar to the overall U.S. population - was heart disease, as shown in Table 10. By contrast, in Georgia, the leading cause of death for Latinos was unintentional injuries, as shown in Table 11.

■ Among Hispanics in Georgia, the death rate from homicides was higher among Latinos (9.5) than non-Hispanic Whites (3.2).⁴⁶

■ Latinos in Georgia had the highest rate of young adult deaths 15 to 19 years (88.8) compared to non-Hispanic

Blacks (67.1) and non-Hispanic Whites (71.7). Similarly, for young adult deaths, rates for 20- to 24-year-olds were higher for Latinos (120.9) compared to non-Hispanic Whites (85.2).⁴⁷

TABLE 10**Leading Causes of Death for the U.S. Latino Population in 2004⁴⁸**

Type	Number of Deaths	Percentage	Rate
1. Heart Disease	27,887	23.8%	71.9
2. Malignant Neoplasms	23,141	19.1%	59.7
3. Unintentional Injuries	10,106	8.6%	26.1
4. Cerebrovascular Disease	6,451	5.5%	16.6
5. Diabetes Mellitus	5,912	5.0%	15.3
6. Chronic Liver Disease	3,409	2.9%	8.8
7. Assault	3,129	2.7%	8.1
8. Lower Respiratory	3,058	2.6%	7.9
9. Influenza/Pneumonia	2,824	2.4%	7.3
10. Conditions with Perinatal	2,402	2.1%	6.2

Source: *National Vital Statistics Report*, Vol. 53, No. 17, March 7, 2005.

Access to Care

■ In 2002-2003, 43% of nonelderly Latinos in Georgia did not have health insurance, as shown in Figure 5. Despite their high rates of labor force participation, Latinos both in Georgia and nationally are overrepresented in low-wage jobs which often do not provide employer-sponsored health coverage (see Table 12) or, if provided, tends to be too expensive for them to afford. In addition, the health care systems in Latin American countries differ from those in the U.S. and are often subsidized by the government. Thus, many Hispanic workers do not understand the concept

TABLE 11

Leading Causes of Death for the Georgia Latino Population, All Age Groups, in 2002⁴⁹

Type	Type
1. Unintentional Injury	6. Congenital Anomalies
2. Malignant Neoplasms	7. Cerebrovascular Disease
3. Heart Disease	8. Diabetes Mellitus
4. Homicide	9. Suicide
5. Perinatal Period	10. HIV

Source: National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) 2002, *National Vital Statistics System*.

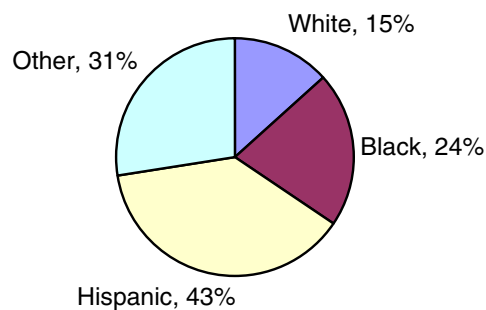
of health insurance and are therefore reluctant to take advantage of this benefit.

■ Another issue related to access is the number of Latino health care providers, as shown in

Table 13. Existing research suggests that increasing the diversity of health care providers can improve patient access and satisfaction as well as the quality of care for all patients.⁵⁰

FIGURE 5

Rate of Nonelderly Uninsured by Race/Ethnicity in Georgia, 2002-2003



Source: Urban Institute and Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured estimates based on pooled March 2003 and 2004 *Current Population Surveys*.

TABLE 12

Rate of Nonelderly with Employer Coverage by Race/Ethnicity, state data 2002-2003, U.S. 2003

	GA #	GA %	U.S. #	U.S. %
White	3,326,850	70	114,780,870	69
Black	1,291,730	58	15,490,570	48
Hispanic	176,680	40	15,466,660	40
Other	174,510	68	9,625,630	58
Total	4,969,770	NA	155,363,720	NA

Sources: Urban Institute and Kaiser Commission on Medicaid and the Uninsured estimates based on pooled March 2003 and 2004 *Current Population Surveys*.

TABLE 13

Latino Health Care Providers in Georgia, 2004

Provider Type	Percent of all Providers
Doctors	5%
Nurses	2%
Dentists	2.8%

Source: <http://explorer.dol.state.us>

Preventive Care

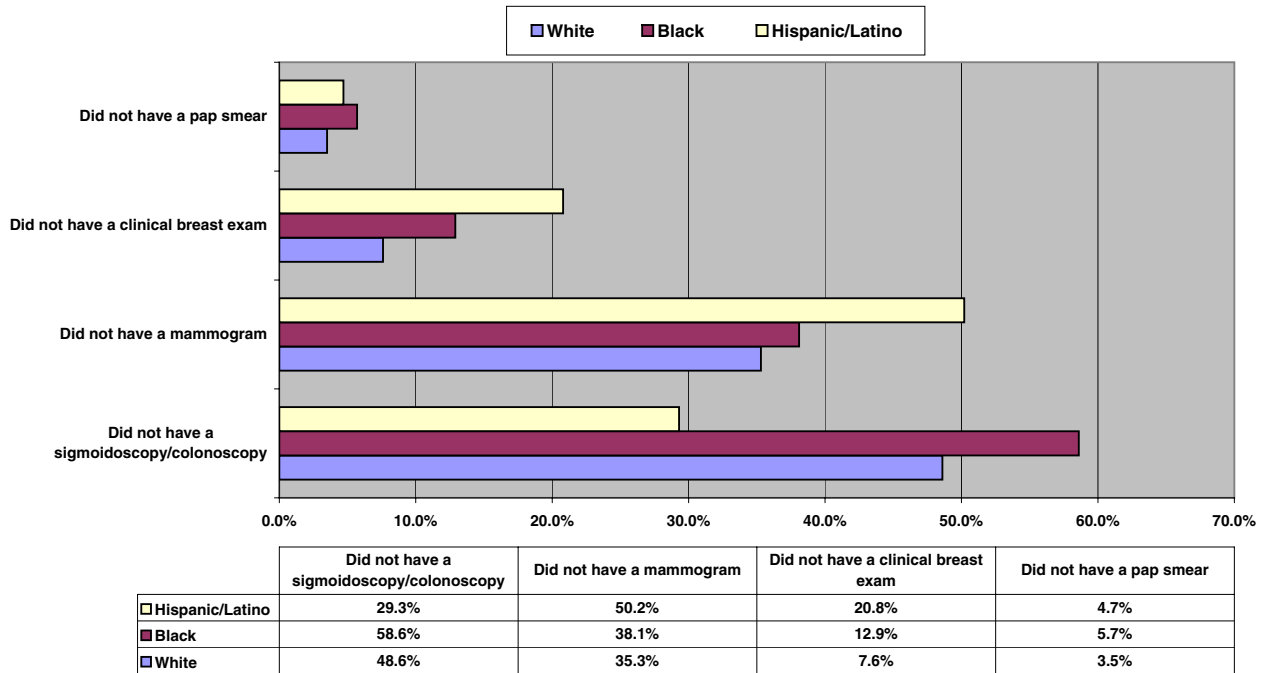
- Many risks that Latinos in Georgia face are related to the underutilization of preventive services, including cancer

screening, as shown in Figure 6. Having health insurance has been associated with increased cancer screening for all racial/ethnic groups.⁵¹ Due to the high rates of uninsurance

among Hispanics in Georgia, it is no surprise that they are among the least likely to use preventive services.

FIGURE 6

Preventive Screening Trends, 2002



Source: Georgia BRFSS 2002.

Infants and Children

- Only 65% of Latinas in Georgia sought early and adequate prenatal care compared to 73% of non-Hispanic Blacks and 81% of non-Hispanic Whites.⁵²
- Neonatal death rates (within first 28 days of life) were higher among Latinos (4.8) than non-Hispanics Whites (4.1).⁵³
- All infant death rates (within one year) were highest among

Latinos (2.5) compared to non-Hispanic Blacks (1.9) and non-Hispanic Whites (1.2).⁵⁴

- In 2002-2003, the proportion of immunized children ages 19-35 months in Georgia was similar across racial/ethnic groups (79% of Latino children compared to 81% of Whites and 80% of Blacks). Moreover, a larger share of Georgia’s Latino children is immunized compared to U.S. Latino children as a whole.⁵⁵

- Among Hispanic participants in the Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) program two to five years old, more than one-third (35%) were at risk for being overweight or were overweight, compared to 26% of Whites and 24% of Blacks.⁵⁶

Mental Health

- Latinos in Georgia were more likely to report poor mental health (44%), compared to Whites (32%) and Blacks (36%).⁵⁷
- Almost one-third (31%) of Latino students in Georgia reported stopping usual activities because they felt sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row.⁵⁸
- One in five (19%) Latino students reported they considered attempting suicide in the past 12 months,⁵⁹ and 16% of Latino students made a plan about how they would attempt suicide during the past 12 months.⁶⁰

Summary and Conclusion

The unprecedented growth of the Latino community in Georgia has left social service and government agencies scrambling to gather information and find ways to provide services to this young and growing community. While there is still a need for more information on the state's Latino residents, what is available casts a spotlight on the needs and challenges facing the community and the necessity to find ways to address them. Latinos are a young and hardworking population that is employed in some of the lowest-paying and most dangerous jobs. They represent a significant segment of the future workforce,

and through their productivity, work, and buying power are key contributors to the state's economic stability and development. However, to maximize their potential and ensure that they have equal opportunities to participate in fueling the state's economy and integrating into the social fabric, the public and private sectors must understand and address disparities that exist between Latinos and other Georgians. In particular, attention must be paid to:

- Addressing language barriers that affect school outcomes, access to health care, and their

understanding of important safety information at work or on the roads, as well as information on employment benefits.

- Issues that affect youth, including unintentional injuries, teenage pregnancy, and mental health status and treatment.
- Policies that affect, restrict, or curtail access to education and health care by immigrant parents and their children.

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