
Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES) Smoking Cessation Project

Tales from the Garden, #24

by Tawny Mellors



BALL is including smoking cessation as part of its Bicultural Healthy Living framework. It is an exciting time as we move to share the information about the CLUES team. They are innovative and passionate as they share their work about smoking cessation.

This article will examine how bicultural and ethnically diverse populations are seeking to curtail tobacco usage. Each article will add insight into the efforts to accomplish this goal and, in turn, establish empirical data that can be employed to successfully shape future tobacco cessation initiatives.

While the existence of health disparities is well documented along racial and ethnic lines with reference to tobacco use, an understanding to the perpetuation of consumption has not been as equally explored historically. The institutionalization of tobacco consumption has remained largely elusive. Ground breaking efforts to understand the continued practice within the context of culture are being made by organizations such as Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES).



CLUES, a community health-driven organization that specializes in assisting Latinos, immigrants, refugees and members of the Latino LGBTQ populations, was the first grantee interviewed in this series for its efforts to curb tobacco use amongst their target communities both within the healthcare system and in their communities. Two healthcare workers from within the organization, Community Health Program Manager Carla Koehler and Program Manager Raul Fernandez, were interviewed on October 13, 2017.

Assessments were administered by CLUES, and information was gathered from local health care clinics. Additionally, members of the CLUES organization went into the Latino/LGBTQ community to inquire about smoking habits and mental health. CLUES utilizes structured and unstructured data collection methods and analyze the results about this specific population. According to Raul 31% of the of the community leaders have been interviewed with positive results.

Mr. Fernandez stated that CLUES plans to have 15 interviews completed by healthcare providers. Additional target areas are as follows; 7 community leaders (especially the leaders from the LGBTQ Latino community in Minnesota), 8 Listening sessions(reaching out to 80 people, 80 community members in the Twin Cities Metropolitan area).

Ms. Carla Kohler and Mr. Raul Fernandez explained the main focus of their research and outreach is based on health disparities that disproportionately impact Latinos in Minnesota, particularly witnessed in their LGBTQ and mentally ill subcultures. More specifically, they spoke about how these marginalized populations served by the several different tobacco cessation initiatives offered by CLUES. Ms. Koehler and Mr. Fernandez were both individually interviewed to provide an overview on the range of the CLUES initiatives and to explore how culturally competent healthcare personnel might affect tobacco use in the target communities.



Carla Koehler stated that Latinos who suffer from a mental illness, have a history of trauma, and those who struggle with their sexual identity share two common obstacles; overcoming attitudinal barriers that perpetuate tobacco use and finding culturally competent healthcare workers to refer or administer treatment options for tobacco consumption / addiction.

Raul spoke about the positive response his interviews have received and requests for policy changes. Many of the healthcare workers he had spoken with had also indicated they didn't know the referral process in which to send clients to receive smoking cessation assistance.

Raul also explained other ways doctors build closer relationships to their clients is to go out and smoke with them, it elicits a trust building exercise. This example comes from information CLUES has collected from listening sessions. Currently CLUES has conducted 47 listening sessions. Community members that participate in the listening sessions are 18 years of age or older and most of whom are women. Women in the Latino community tend to have more flexibility in their schedules and are also more engaged in their communities. The succeeding target group is men. CLUES is determined to be intentional in their efforts in collecting data and to be a presence in their community.

Mr. Fernandez and Ms. Kohler also spoke about how important it is to be intentional in collecting assessments and in recommending tobacco cessation referrals. The outcome is measured with how many lives can be accounted for and how many of those lives make a change.