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Rapid Cycle Quality Improvement (RCQI) Approaches for Developing the Capacity of Community- Based Organizations to Address COVID-19 and Cancer Disparities in Latinx Communities

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Background

- COVID-19 disproportionately affected Latinx communities in Massachusetts, resulting in higher infection rates, increased unemployment, loss of health insurance, and interruptions in medical care such as cancer screenings and appointments.
- Latinx-serving community-based organizations (CBO's) responded to the COVID-19 pandemic by facilitating access to healthcare, COVID testing, and vaccinations for underserved Latinx and provided many other essential services.
- There is a need to build CBO's capacity for **self-assessment** and to build on their **unique perspective on systemic barriers** to addressing the multiple needs of Latinx communities during a public health crisis

Methods

Using RCQI, Latinx-serving CBO's assessed their efforts during the previous year and the current capacity to address the post-pandemic impacts of COVID-19 on their stakeholders.

CBO's attended workshops and received technical support on quality improvement methods, data use, and Rapid Cycle Quality Improvement.

Each group presented their quality improvement work in their ongoing projects and participated in a focus group addressing disparities in breast cancer screening mammography



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Organizations COVID-19 responses



Brazilian Worker's Center

Supports immigrants in defending and advancing their labor and immigrant rights.

- Developed a food pantry and home delivery system in response to COVID.
- While they had health programs before, they created new ones in Portuguese and Spanish to address new needs.
- Budget has doubled in past year, though none of it has gone to staffing.



La Colaborativa Chelsea Collaborative

Focuses on food and housing security, economic advancement, cultural celebration, and immigrant leadership that drives policy and systems changes.

- Organization grew from 7 full-time employees to 48 full-time employees during COVID.
- Created a food pantry which served as a hub for other services and community recruitment.
- Implemented Promotores de Salud program which helped increase vaccination rates among Latinos in Chelsea.

Organizations COVID-19 responses



Center for Health Impact

Helps organizations and communities develop the sustained capacity to promote health and well-being.

- Provided interpreters for a city-wide Zoom meeting with 1000 attendants in 7 languages.
- Created and implemented new trainings for 108 interpreters to address shift to virtual in response to COVID.
- Streamed graduation in order to provide live interpreter services.



Latino Education Institute

Seeks to improve the academic achievement and well-being of Latino students (grades K-16) and their families.

- Translated and disseminated COVID information to Latino families on behalf of city government.
- Provided home visits to families with COVID to provide services and resources.
- Partnered with UMass Memorial to distribute over 100,000 PPE packs.

Lessons Learned

Structural inequities and their impact on health:

- *Economic insecurity caused people to put themselves at higher risk of COVID infections.*
- *Immigration status and documentation requirements prevented people from seeking care.*

Inequities in resources for community-based organizations:

- *Organizations responded and put resources towards every challenge that arose, but were **underfunded** and had to be creative with staffing and funds*
- *Organizations had to provide many services **outside of their scope of work** because of the great needs they identified*
- *Governments were not always able to provide needed services, either because they did not identify the need or could not serve it, both due to a **lack of diversity within government***

Lessons Learned

Cancer prevention and screening

- *Focusing on cancer prevention and screening is difficult when there are pressing economic and health issues affecting Latinx families, especially during the pandemic*
- *The pandemic exacerbated inequities in access to cancer screening*
- *Gendered expectations around family roles may make it more difficult for Latina women to prioritize their own healthcare*
- *Cultural taboos around naming cancer and fatalistic attitudes towards illness can be challenges for building and maintaining cancer survivor support groups*

Recommendations

Examine the structural determinants and history of racism, classism, sexism, and nationalism and understand those in order to understand current barriers and address them

“So it’s a fact, we have data to back that up, we have research to back that up, that you know, people of color are more likely to die of a heart attack, are more likely to have all of those issues, and of course, you know, the stress level from you know, racism and discrimination, and these stressors on us are much higher than on White people. So we have to agree on those things, accept those things, and start building from there. And we need to really start there.”

Provide more economic opportunities and support to communities

“Instead of building more food pantries, can we build workforce opportunity, can we create jobs? Job trainings? Many times when people came here they said, instead of giving me a check to help me pay for my rent, can you give me a job? So instead of giving people an assistance for rent, we hired them, we gave them a stipend to work in the food pantry. Because to them that made more sense, and to us too, so those, those, creating a social structure to build people up, to give them skills and opportunities to build them up, that’s our workforce.”



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Recommendations

Increase diversity at City Hall, other government institutions, and NGOs, so that staff represent and understand communities

“You need to open your doors and your HR departments so that you have the right people, instead of saying you can’t find Latinos, or you can’t find, you know, people from Africa, or from wherever to hire, that you can’t find them, when your schools and your colleges and your universities are filled to the core with these people, but you can’t find them, and so to me it’s about transparency, and it’s about, you know, partnerships need to be a two-way street, they can’t be one way. And that, you know, we need to acknowledge what everyone does well, you know.”

Support Latinx-serving CBOs through true partnerships

*Right, you know I think that also, **I just want to say that municipalities need to learn from community too.** So I would like to see, you know, that municipalities and government in general acknowledge best practices, right? So you know, promotores de salud has been a model that has been out there for a long time, some of us are doing it, they don’t even know how to pronounce the word. People need to know that this is a best practice strategy. So I think that, ... **it’s time to flip the coin. ...If you don’t have the capacity, then let us build your capacity.** Let us build you a pipeline of staff that you can hire so that we don’t have to do all this work.”*



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Recommendations

Fund CBO staff time and resources.

*“One thing I’ve noticed that I know we’ve talked about at the Brazilian Worker’s Center is **some serious inequities in the distribution of resources that can help people mobilize labor to do this work.** It’s difficult doing this kind of mediating work and connecting people to what they need and there’s never any, very much support, a few foundations were offering it during the pandemic for organizations that had to repurpose their staff capacity to handle these emergency situations, and programs for which they were funded, and the staff were originally hired and actually are supposed to be working on, they were not able to do those things. And they make, I understand the pitfalls in setting boundaries, but the **CBOs have had to pick up a lot of this labor through volunteer engagement.**”*



Future Directions

Building on CBO expertise

- *CBOs benefited from time for reflection and RCQI tools to identify their own strengths and needs*
- *Sharing their experiences with other CBOs and building the capacity for advocacy*
- *How to create space to facilitate these activities and interactions*

Addressing systemic barriers to true partnerships

- *How to engage government and funders in creating equitable partnerships to support community resilience*

Future Directions

Understanding barriers to cancer prevention and screening

- *How to address inequities in the availability of cancer screening in working class and communities of color*
- *Understanding cultural barriers to talking about cancer in order to develop culturally appropriate messaging and interventions to engage cancer prevention and screening*