

“Mentes Fuertes”: A Bilingual Mental Health Literacy Program for Latino Communities

Aisha Ayloush

University of California, Los Angeles



Summary:

“Mentes Fuertes” is a bilingual (Spanish–English) community based mental health literacy program designed to improve understanding of common mental health conditions, reduce stigma, and increase awareness of available support services among Latino adults ages 18 and older. The program will provide culturally responsive workshops led by trained bilingual facilitators/ community health workers and will distribute accessible educational materials in both languages. By combining mental health education with trusted community spaces, this project aims to empower participants with knowledge, normalize help seeking behaviors, and strengthen connections to local mental health resources.

Statement of Need / Problem Description

Latino communities in the United States experience significant barriers to mental health care, resulting in lower rates of diagnosis and treatment despite comparable or higher levels of psychological distress. Mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety often go unrecognized or untreated due to limited mental health literacy, cultural stigma, and language barriers. For many Spanish speaking individuals, mental health information is primarily available in English, making it difficult to understand symptoms, treatment options, or how to access care.

This issue is especially critical for Latino communities because structural and cultural factors intersect to restrict access to services. Immigration-related stress, discrimination, economic insecurity, and family separation increase vulnerability to mental health challenges, yet fear of judgment, lack of culturally responsive providers, and limited insurance coverage discourage help-seeking. Additionally, cultural values emphasizing resilience and privacy can unintentionally reinforce stigma and silence around mental health concerns.

National data indicate that Latino adults are less likely than non-Latino White adults to receive mental health treatment, even when experiencing symptoms of mental illness. Research also shows that limited English proficiency is associated with decreased use of mental health services and poorer quality of care. Community based observations further reveal that many Latino individuals are unaware of common mental health symptoms or believe that emotional distress should be managed privately rather than through professional support. These patterns contribute to delayed intervention, worsening symptoms, and preventable strain on families and communities. Addressing mental health literacy through bilingual, culturally grounded education is essential for reducing stigma, promoting early recognition of symptoms, and improving pathways to care.

Target Audience / Community Served

The target population for this project is Latino adults ages 18 and older who reside in urban and suburban communities with limited access to culturally and linguistically appropriate mental

health education. This program will prioritize Spanish-speaking and bilingual individuals, including immigrants and first generation families who may experience barriers related to language, stigma, and limited familiarity with the U.S. health care system. Cultural values such as familismo, respect, and community trust will shape the project's design to ensure that materials and activities are culturally relevant and accessible. Programming will be delivered in both Spanish and English to accommodate varying levels of language proficiency and to promote inclusivity across diverse Latino identities and backgrounds.

Proposed Program / Activities

This project will implement a bilingual mental health literacy program consisting of a series of interactive workshops designed for Latino adults ages 18 and older. The program will focus on increasing knowledge of common mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and stress, while also addressing stigma and misconceptions about mental illness. Each workshop will be offered in both Spanish and English and will use culturally responsive teaching strategies, including real life examples, visual materials, and group discussion.

Program activities will include educational presentations delivered by public health professionals on common mental health conditions, stress management, and available treatment options. Each session will also include a Q&A segment to encourage participant engagement, address misconceptions, and create space for open dialogue. Participants will receive bilingual educational handouts and a resource guide listing low cost and community based mental health services to support continued learning beyond the workshop.

The program will be facilitated by bilingual public health students or trained community health workers in collaboration with local nonprofit organizations and mental health providers. Facilitators will be responsible for delivering educational content, leading group discussions, and connecting participants to appropriate mental health resources based on individual needs

Workshops will take place at trusted community locations such as community centers, churches/mosques, and nonprofit organizations that serve Latino populations. Sessions may also be offered virtually to increase accessibility. The program will be delivered in small group settings to promote comfort, cultural sensitivity, and open dialogue.

Evaluation & Impact

Program success will be evaluated using both process and outcome measures. Desired outcomes include increased mental health knowledge, reduced stigma toward mental illness, and improved awareness of available mental health services among participants. The program also aims to improve participants' confidence in recognizing symptoms and seeking professional help.

Attendance and retention will be encouraged through a structured workshop series in which participants who complete a designated number of sessions will receive a Certificate of Mental Health Literacy. This certificate will recognize their participation and knowledge gained and may be used for personal, academic, or professional development purposes.

Outcomes will be tracked through attendance records and pre- and post-workshop surveys administered in both Spanish and English. Surveys will assess changes in participants' understanding of common mental health conditions, attitudes toward mental health, and knowledge of how to access care. Participant feedback forms will also be used to evaluate satisfaction with the workshops, cultural relevance of the materials, and perceived usefulness of the information. Together, these measures will provide quantitative and qualitative data to assess program effectiveness and guide future improvements.

Optional: Sustainability or Growth Plan

“Mentes Fuertes” is designed for long term impact and scalability beyond its initial launch. Sustainability will be supported through partnerships with local community organizations, faith based institutions, and public health programs, ensuring ongoing access to trusted spaces and trained facilitators. By training bilingual public health students and community health workers to deliver workshops, the program builds internal capacity and a replicable model for other communities.

The program can expand geographically to reach additional urban and suburban Latino populations or adapt content for youth, caregivers, or specific subgroups, such as recent immigrants or individuals with limited English proficiency. Workshops may also be offered virtually to increase accessibility and reach participants who cannot attend in person.

Long term sustainability will be supported by documenting program curricula, facilitator guides, and evaluation tools, enabling other organizations to replicate or adapt the model. Seeking grant funding, integrating the program into community health initiatives, and establishing a volunteer facilitator network will further support ongoing delivery and continuous improvement. By combining strong community partnerships with adaptable program resources, “Mentes Fuertes” can continue to empower Latino adults with mental health knowledge, reduce stigma, and strengthen connections to care over time.

References

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MENTES FUERTES: HEALTHY MINDS

A BILINGUAL MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY PROGRAM FOR LATINO COMMUNITIES

01.

What is Mentas Fuertes? | ¿Qué es Mentas Fuertes?

- A bilingual community program for Latino adults
- Builds understanding of common mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, and stress
- Reduces stigma and connects participants to local mental health resources



Why It Matters | ¿Por qué es importante?

- Many Latino adults face barriers to mental health care
- Limited information in Spanish and cultural stigma prevent seeking help
- Stress from immigration, discrimination, and economic challenges increases mental health risks

02.

How the Program Works | ¿Cómo funciona el programa?

- Interactive workshops in Spanish and English
- Led by trained bilingual facilitators / community health workers
- Q&A sessions, and resource guides provided
- Locations: community centers, churches/mosques, and online



03.

Join us/ Get Involved | ¡Únete!

- Open to Latino adults 18+
- Small group sessions for comfort and engagement
- Certificates of Mental Health Literacy upon completion
- Build knowledge, reduce stigma, and connect with community resources

04.

