

1. Title:

Bridging Language Gaps: A Community-Based Medical Spanish Navigation Pilot for Latino Patients

Summary:

This project proposes a pilot community-based program designed to improve healthcare access and patient understanding among Spanish-speaking Latino adults through language-concordant navigation support. The program will train bilingual medical students and community volunteers to provide culturally responsive guidance before and after clinical encounters, with an emphasis on appointment preparation, understanding diagnoses and treatment plans, and navigating follow-up care. By reducing language barriers and strengthening communication, this initiative seeks to increase patient confidence, improve care adherence, and enhance overall healthcare experiences in a Latino-majority community.

2. Statement of Need / Problem Description

Language barriers remain a major contributor to healthcare inequities experienced by Latino communities in the United States. Spanish-speaking patients with limited English proficiency are more likely to report poor communication with healthcare providers, misunderstand diagnoses and treatment plans, and experience lower satisfaction and worse health outcomes. Latinos represent the largest population with limited English proficiency nationwide, yet access to qualified medical interpreters and language-concordant care remains inconsistent.

These disparities are driven by systemic factors, including time-limited clinical encounters, insufficient availability of bilingual providers, lack of culturally responsive communication, and limited patient education materials in Spanish. Many Latino patients report hesitation to ask questions or disclose concerns during medical visits due to language barriers and power dynamics. In Latino-majority communities, these challenges contribute to delayed care, reduced adherence to treatment, and preventable complications. Addressing language concordance and patient navigation is essential to advancing health equity for Latino patients.

3. Target Audience / Community Served

The project will serve adult Spanish-speaking Latino patients with Spanish language preference who are receiving care in a Latino-majority community in Southern California. The target population includes individuals who experience barriers related to language access, health literacy, and healthcare system navigation, particularly patients managing chronic conditions or complex treatment plans. Program design will be informed by key cultural values such as *respeto*, *confianza*, and *cercanía*, emphasizing trust-building, clear and respectful communication, and the role of family members in health decision-making. These demographic, geographic, and cultural considerations will guide how navigation support and patient education are delivered.

4. Proposed Program / Activities

This project will implement a small-scale pilot program focused on language-concordant patient navigation for Spanish-speaking Latino patients. The program will train bilingual medical students and community volunteers to provide culturally responsive, patient-centered navigation support within appropriate ethical boundaries.

Key activities will include offering pre-visit assistance to help patients prepare questions and understand the purpose of upcoming medical appointments, as well as post-visit follow-up in Spanish to reinforce understanding of diagnoses, medications, and recommended next steps. The project will also develop plain-language Spanish educational materials to support patient comprehension and engagement.

The program will be carried out in partnership with a community clinic or local organization in a Latino-majority area, using a combination of in-person and phone-based support to meet patients where they are.

5. Evaluation & Impact

Program success will be evaluated using both process and outcome measures. The primary outcomes include improved patient understanding of medical information, increased confidence in communicating with healthcare providers, and greater adherence to recommended follow-up care.

These outcomes will be tracked through multiple methods, including pre- and post-participation surveys assessing patient understanding and communication confidence, brief participant feedback forms to capture perceived usefulness and satisfaction, and attendance records documenting engagement with navigation services. Follow-up completion rates will also be monitored to assess changes in care adherence.

Together, these evaluation strategies will allow for assessment of program feasibility, participant acceptability, and early impact on healthcare experiences among Spanish-speaking Latino patients.

6. Optional: Sustainability or Growth Plan

If successful, this pilot program could be sustained and expanded through partnerships with additional community clinics and Latino-serving organizations. The model could be integrated into medical education programs as a structured service-learning or volunteer initiative, allowing for ongoing participation by bilingual medical students. Future growth may include training additional cohorts of student navigators and developing standardized training materials and toolkits to support replication in other Latino-majority or Latino-serving communities. This approach would allow the program to scale while maintaining cultural and linguistic responsiveness.