

1. Project Title & Summary (100 words max)

Project Name: El Camino: A Virtual Nature-Based Mental Health Program for Latino Patients

El Camino is a six-week, culturally responsive virtual mental health program addressing rising psychological distress among Latino patients amid intensified immigration enforcement and HR1 bill healthcare policy changes. In partnership with the UCLA Spanish Speaking Psychosocial Clinic (SSPC), this intervention integrates evidence based cognitive behavioral therapy principles with nature-based practices to improve access to mental health care, promote overall wellbeing and strengthen connections to nature and culture. Delivered in Spanish under supervision of a bilingual psychiatrist, supported by bilingual medical students and community health workers, El Camino creates an accessible healing space for Latino individuals to engage mental health management.

2. Statement of Need / Problem Description

Latino communities in the United States experience persistent mental health disparities, with Latino adults about 28% less likely to receive mental health treatment than U.S. adults despite high need, and only about 40% of Latino individuals with mental health conditions accessing services (1). Immigration enforcement actions, ICE raids and anticipated policy changes heighten fear and instability in mixed-status families, contributing to care avoidance and increased anxiety, depression and worse self-rated health (2, 3). These disparities are further compounded by structural barriers such as language differences, stigma and shortage of psychiatrists, reinforcing the urgent need for culturally responsive interventions that address both mental health symptoms and systemic barriers to care (1). My experiences as a Latino and through clinical work with the UCLA SSPC have continued to reveal immigration related fears and related care avoidance among patients, reflecting real community barriers and structural inequities to mental health access.

Innovative, culturally grounded approaches are critical now more than ever in addressing mental health needs. Nature-based interventions represent an emerging, evidence-informed strategy shown to reduce depression, anxiety, and perceived stress while improving emotional regulation, even through indirect exposure such as plants, imagery or soundscapes (4,5). When delivered in a group setting, these practices promote protective factors that strengthen mental health including community building, collective reflection and connection. Rooting healing in shared cultural traditions and our relationship with the natural environment reinforces identity, belonging and resilience, particularly for Latino communities navigating structural stress and sociopolitical uncertainty. Virtual delivery provides a key safety advantage in the current sociopolitical climate by allowing patients to

access from a space of security and has shown promise for delivering mental health services (6).

El Camino responds to the critical need to address mental health by providing culturally grounded, evidence-based mental health support at a time when mental health is increasingly vulnerable. Addressing these disparities now is not just a matter of individual wellbeing but of collective health and equity, underscoring the importance of interventions that prioritize culture, community and accessible care in moments of heightened need.

3. Target Audience / Community Served

El Camino will serve Spanish-speaking Latino adults (ages 18+) receiving care through the UCLA Spanish Speaking Psychosocial Clinic (SSPC).

The target population includes:

- Immigrant and mixed-status families
- Low-income Latino patients
- Latino patients experiencing mild to moderate depression, anxiety or stress

4. Proposed Program / Activities

What I propose to do: Deliver a six-week, group-based virtual mental health program that integrates CBT skills with nature-based activities to improve access to mental health care, support overall psychological well-being and facilitate connection to nature and culture. Patients will receive a certificate of completion following completion of the program.

Activities: Sessions integrate CBT skills and nature-based practices through guided meditation, ongoing plant care and planting activities, nature observation, nature related sensory engagement, emotion labeling, gratitude and compassion practices and culturally rooted discussions about identity, healing and shared experiences such as cultural meals and ingredients that connect patients to tradition and community. Patients engage in group reflection and discussion and practice strategies they can use to support emotional regulation and resilience.

Who will be involved: SSPC patients (Spanish-speaking Latino adults), facilitators including third-year medical students supervised by licensed faculty, SSPC psychiatric physician and community health workers (CHWs) who support outreach, technology navigation and engagement.

Where and how it will happen: The program will take place fully virtual via Zoom. Patients will be trained to use the Zoom application and receive ongoing technical support from medical students and community health workers.

5. Evaluation & Impact

Success will be defined as reductions in psychometrics scores (PHQ9, GAD7, PSS), increased confidence in managing health (PAM13), more than 75% program completion rate, high participant reported cultural acceptability and patient testimonials/anecdotal experiences reflecting improved wellbeing.

Outcomes

Primary Outcomes

- Reduction in depressive symptoms (PHQ9)
- Reduction in anxiety symptoms (GAD7)
- Reduced perceived stress (PSS)
- Increased confidence and self-efficacy in managing health (PAM13)

Secondary Outcomes

- Positive patient narratives describing perceived benefits
- Adequate perceived cultural relevance and safety of sessions

Measurement

- Baseline, midpoint (Week 3), and post program (Week 6) surveys
- Psychometrics: validated screening tools (PHQ9, GAD7, PSS)
- Increased confidence in managing health: validated screening tool (PAM13)
- Cultural relevance and experience: qualitative feedback (open ended reflections)
- Attendance and retention rates: Electronic Health Record tracking

6. Optional: Sustainability or Growth Plan

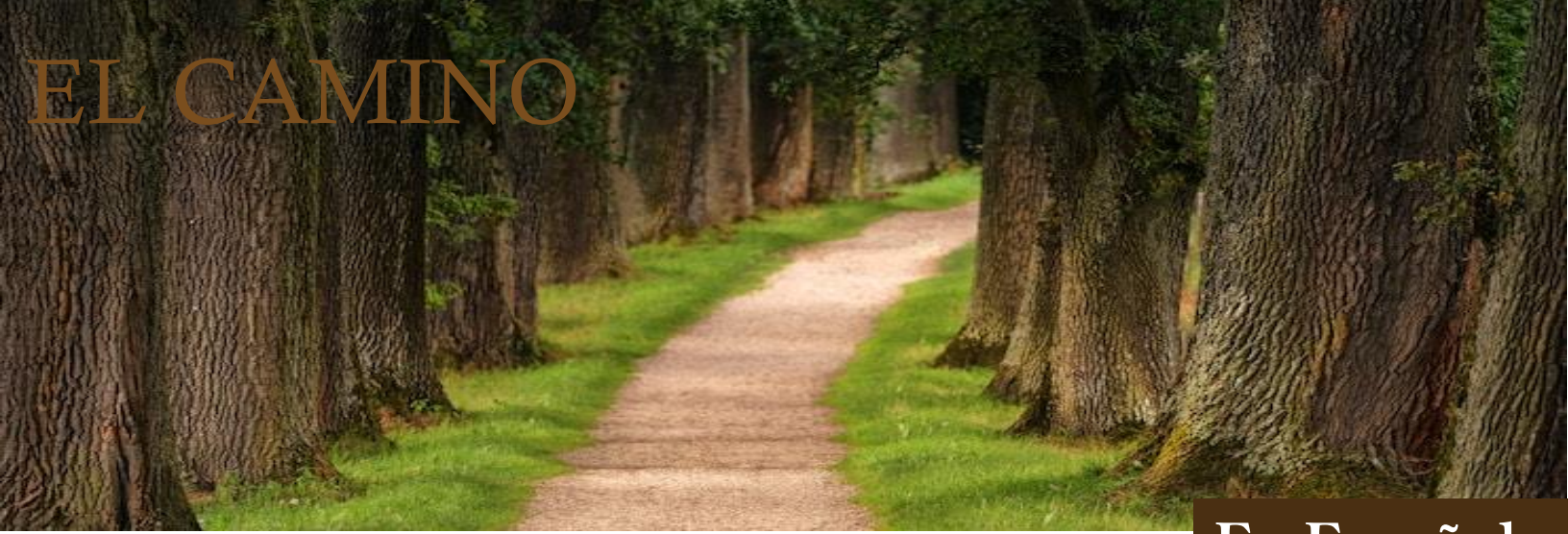
El Camino is designed to be sustainable and scalable within existing healthcare systems by structuring group sessions as billable behavioral health encounters under licensed supervision. This allows for long term embedding within the UCLA SSPC infrastructure and development of ongoing patient cohorts to expand access and continuity of care.

Sustainability will be strengthened by training medical students, resident physician trainees and community health workers to co-facilitate future cohorts. Developing a standardized facilitator manual for replication and leveraging SSPC's academic infrastructure for ongoing quality improvement will further support sustainability. Long term the program will serve as a replicable model for the delivery of culturally grounded mental health care, adaptable to virtual or in-person settings, promoting improved access to and management of mental health for the Latino community.

References

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2. A.L. Johnson, C. Levesque, N.A. Lewis, & A.L. Asad, Deportation threat predicts Latino US citizens and noncitizens' psychological distress, 2011 to 2018, *Proc. Natl. Acad. Sci. U.S.A.* 121 (9) e2306554121, <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.2306554121> (2024).
3. B Guariglia, Y Yamasaki, C Perez, C Zumaeta-Castillo, M Lazo, L Bakely, A Martinez-Donate, Prevalence of Mental health and Receipt of Services in Latino Immigrants Living in Philadelphia, *European Journal of Public Health*, Volume 34, Issue Supplement_3, November 2024, ckae144.949, <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckae144.949>
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6. Berryhill MB, Culmer N, Williams N, et al. Videoconferencing psychotherapy and depression: a systematic review. *Telemed J E Health*. 2019;25(6):435-446. doi:10.1089/tmj.2018.0058

EL CAMINO



En Español
y Virtual

Un programa de salud mental basado en la naturaleza
para pacientes que buscan conexión y bienestar

TODOS LOS MIÉRCOLES

HASTA XX/XX/XX

HORARIO: XX:XX

Interesado o con preguntas?

Contáctenos para más
información.

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Aprender sobre:

- Herramientas naturales para aliviar el estrés
- Atención plena a través de la respiración y el cuerpo
- Formas más saludables de relacionarse con las emociones
- Conexión a la naturaleza y cultural
- Un plan de autocuidado sencillo y sostenible.