



Cultural Connection Toolkit

An educational resource

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FAIR360

Hispanic Heritage Month 2024: Perspectives for Inclusive Organizations

As we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month in 2024, it's crucial to reflect on the rich tapestry of contributions, struggles and achievements of Hispanic and Latino communities in the United States. This month-long observance, which runs from September 15 to October 15, provides an opportunity for us to honor the diverse cultures, histories and traditions of Hispanic and Latino Americans while recognizing their profound impact on shaping the nation's identity.

This Cultural Connection Toolkit features two insightful articles focusing on empowering Hispanic and Latino communities in healthcare and addressing unique challenges facing these employees in the workplace. It also provides a comprehensive timeline tracing pivotal moments in Hispanic and Latino American history. The facts and figures section sheds light on the demographic trends, achievements and challenges facing Hispanic and Latino communities today.

We've reimaged and improved our popular Meeting in a Box as a Cultural Connection Toolkit, designed to foster closer, more inclusive and understanding team environments through cultural education and facilitated discussions. By engaging with the diverse stories, experiences and perspectives highlighted in this toolkit, we hope to deepen your understanding of Hispanic heritage and cultivate a workplace culture that celebrates and respects the contributions of all its members.

Understanding Hispanic and Latino Identities

In this toolkit, we use the terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” to refer to communities originating from Spanish-speaking countries and Latin America.

Hispanic refers to people who speak Spanish or have ancestors from Spanish-speaking countries.

Latino, on the other hand, refers to people with origins in Latin America, regardless of the language spoken in these countries.

A Hispanic individual can sometimes be considered Latino, but this isn't always true. For instance, someone from Spain is Hispanic because they speak Spanish, yet they aren't Latino since Spain is not part of Latin America.

In some instances, we may use “Hispanic and Latino” for information that applies to both communities.



Empowering Hispanic and Latino Communities: Health Equity Through Innovation and Inclusivity

In the United States, the Hispanic and Latino community faces significant challenges in achieving health equity, which is a state where everyone has a fair and just opportunity to attain their highest level of health.

Despite being one of the fastest-growing demographics in the U.S., Hispanics and Latinos often encounter barriers to healthcare access and experience poor health outcomes. Factors such as language barriers, lack of insurance and economic disparities contribute to this inequity. For instance, Hispanics and Latinos are nearly three times more likely to be uninsured compared to non-Hispanic whites, according to the Brookings Institution. This lack of coverage, coupled with cultural and systemic obstacles, leads to disparities in treatment and prevention of diseases like diabetes and mental health disorders, which disproportionately affect the Hispanic and Latino population.

How Top Hospitals and Health Systems are Addressing Hispanic and Latino Health Equity

Michigan-based healthcare system Corewell Health ([No. 8](#) on the 2024 Top Hospitals and Health Systems list) is making significant strides in advancing health equity for Latinos. Recognizing the profound importance of fostering health equity, reducing disparities and increasing access to high-quality care in every community, the company was awarded a \$3.4 million grant by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to advance health equity and prevent chronic illnesses in Latino, Black and Indigenous populations in Wayne County, MI.

This grant, known as the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) grant, will support programming in communities experiencing health disparities.

In a [press release](#), Alicia Jackson, Director of Health Equity and Community health at Corewell Health, said: “The REACH grant will ignite our efforts in Wayne County and Detroit, enabling us to expand vital community partnerships and increase support for populations with the highest risk of chronic disease.”

Chronic illnesses, such as heart disease, cancer, diabetes and stroke, are among the most common causes of illness, disability and death in the United States. Latinos often experience increased rates of chronic illness compared with white people. For example, chronic liver disease is the leading cause of death among Latinos, and the chronic liver disease rate among Latino men and women is twice that of the non-Latino white population.

To address these health disparities, Corewell Health is implementing public health programs that prioritize physical activity, access to healthy foods and care in breastfeeding.



After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, Mayo Clinic (No. 5 on the 2024 Top Hospitals and Health Systems list) strengthened its commitment to supporting the health of minority communities, said Monica Ibarra, Enterprise Equity, Inclusion and Diversity Advisor and Course Director, I-DARE Longitudinal Course, MCASOM-MN, at Mayo Clinic. The company pledged approximately \$100 million over 10 years to combat racism and advance care for non-white patients, which is funded through five Mayo Clinic sites.

In Rochester, NY, she said there is a group of providers who are using social media to engage with the Latino community.

“They are utilizing Instagram and Facebook to get the word out for mammogram screenings for women,” Ibarra said. Based on this success, Mayo Clinic has expanded its strategy to engage with people in other languages.

Furthermore, Mayo Clinic has increased colorectal cancer screenings among the Latino community in Minnesota and Wisconsin.

“Initially, it started as [outreach to] our Black male population and has steadily [expanded] to our Latin community, as that was one of the gaps being identified as awareness, as practice, as that normalized situation of caring for one’s body,” she said. “That can also be seen in our research that we’re leaning into regarding diabetes, which is one that is really prevalent within our Latin community, as is heart disease.”

Language and Technology Barriers and Solutions

Dr. Ashley Gomez, an Assistant Professor of Business Administration at the University of Pittsburgh and a member of The PhD Project, highlighted the complexity of navigating the healthcare system, a challenge that transcends all backgrounds. She emphasized that simplifying the healthcare system is a universal need that would benefit everyone. However, for immigrant populations, particularly those who primarily speak Spanish or Portuguese, language barriers present additional hurdles. Misunderstandings and miscommunications can occur due to things getting lost in translation and can negatively affect the quality of care a person receives.



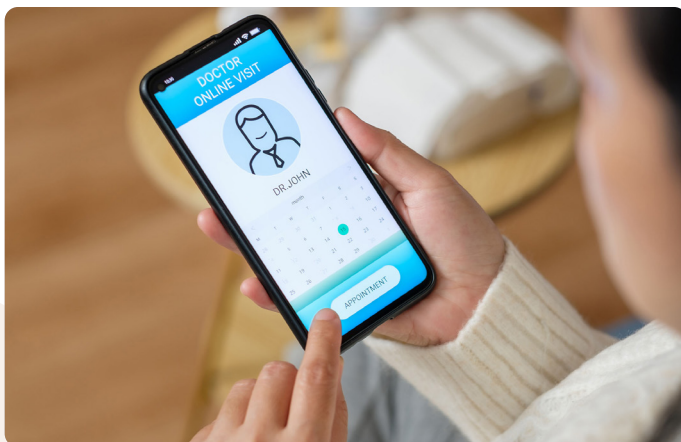
She also brought attention to the digital divide, which is often overlooked, especially when considering age differences. As healthcare systems become increasingly digital, with online appointments and digital reminders requiring an email, the technological divide becomes more apparent. This divide is particularly significant among the Hispanic and Latino community, according to Dr. Gomez's research and anecdotal evidence. Therefore, as healthcare systems evolve, it is crucial that they consider these language and technological barriers to ensure equitable access to care for all.

Healthcare systems can address language barriers in several ways:

Translation Services: Implementing both in-person and digital translation services can help non-English speaking patients understand their healthcare information better. This could include hiring bilingual staff or using translation apps.

Cultural Competency Training: Healthcare providers should undergo cultural competency training to better understand and respect the diverse backgrounds of their patients. This includes understanding language nuances and cultural health beliefs.

Patient Education Materials: Providing patient education materials in multiple languages can help non-English speaking patients understand their health conditions and treatments better.



Community Outreach: Collaborating with community organizations that serve non-English speaking populations can help healthcare systems reach these patients more effectively.

Telehealth Services: Telehealth services can be made more accessible by offering them in multiple languages. This can help non-English speaking patients receive care without language being a barrier.

Health Literacy: Improving health literacy among non-English speaking populations can empower them to make informed health decisions. This can be achieved through educational programs and resources.

Exploring and Understanding Social Determinants of Health

To increase health equity by supporting the economic development of Latino and Hispanic communities, Ibarra said Mayo Clinic has an advisory committee that looks at social determinants of health. When thinking about social determinants of health, she said she thinks of it as a soundboard where all the pegs are moving at different paces and places on the same board regardless of socioeconomic standing, credentialing, age or gender.

People's basic needs have changed since the inception of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs 30 years ago. Ibarra said she is currently doing research to see how those basic needs have changed over time. She explained that Mayo Clinic is examining these changes and their implications on social determinants of health, noting that cultural competence is essential in recognizing that individuals perceive and prioritize their needs differently. She highlighted the importance of understanding these diverse perspectives, especially in vulnerable communities, and stressed that medical professionals need to consider free will, personal pain points and pressure points in identifying wellness. She said this ongoing exploration is crucial for achieving health equity and understanding social determinants of health.

“Although I feel that Maslow’s [Hierarchy] met the interpretation of society at that point in time when that theory was created ... that’s me undulating it over time to become this new thing and how it’s also partnered with those social determinants of health,” she said. “So, I really appreciate that Mayo Clinic is leaning in to take a peek of what that looks like under the hood of our lives, to understand how each one of us is interpreting that very differently from others.”

Fostering Inclusive Entrepreneurial Ecosystems

Dr. Gomez is at the forefront of research that intersects entrepreneurship, well-being, identity and place, with a keen focus on the Hispanic and Latino community. Her research sheds light on the early stages of business development and the importance of inclusivity within entrepreneurial ecosystems. Her work emphasizes the role of entrepreneurship in promoting health and economic development among Hispanic and Latino communities. By fostering an environment where these entrepreneurs can thrive, Dr. Gomez believes we can address some of the root causes of health disparities.

Her professional experience includes collaboration with federal and local government agencies, nonprofits and community-based organizations to tackle societal inequities. She advocates for policies and strategies that not only improve access to healthcare but also enhance the overall economic conditions of Hispanics and Latinos in the U.S.

In discussing the impact of entrepreneurial initiatives on Hispanic and Latino communities, Dr. Gomez highlighted multiple intersections between health and entrepreneurship. She noted that Latinos are engaging in social entrepreneurship and starting businesses at a **faster rate** than the national average, which can help address chronic health disparities. However, financial constraints often lead them to prioritize work over well-being.

“A lot of times there’s financial constraints, meaning that if folks aren’t working, if they’re not enterprising, there’s no food being put on the table,” she said.

Dr. Gomez emphasized the importance of supporting Hispanic and Latino entrepreneurs with more than just funding and business development resources. Things like affordable housing, food security, childcare and access to healthcare must also be considered. Addressing these factors is crucial not only for improving health but also for fostering economic growth within Latino communities.

To ensure entrepreneurial ecosystems contribute positively to the health and economic development of Hispanic and Latino populations, Dr. Gomez said inclusivity and support is needed across various sectors.



“Considering them as full beings, right? I think addressing the social determinants of health is huge,” Gomez said. She pointed out the fragmentation within entrepreneurial ecosystems, which isn’t inherently negative but requires a broader perspective.

Reflecting on the diversity of Hispanic and Latino entrepreneurship, Dr. Gomez said: “A lot of times when we think of entrepreneurial ecosystems, we think of Silicon Valley and Austin and these high tech, high growth sectors. And yes, there are Latinos enterprising in those sectors, but they are also enterprising ... in construction, food and other service industries as well as healthcare.”

She stressed the need for equitable support: “If we’re not providing funding and business development for those businesses as well, not just high tech, high growth, we’re excluding a large population from the ecosystem.”

How Organizations Can Address the Unique Challenges Facing Latino and Hispanic Employees

Effective diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) strategies must take a detailed approach to workplace fairness and inclusion. While broad-stroke principles can lay a helpful DEI foundation, true inclusion is the product of specific strategies that target the unique needs of different segmented populations. For Latino and Hispanic Americans, two obstacles affect their inclusion at a much higher rate than they affect other communities: language barriers and immigration/work authorization status. To accommodate Latino employees and customers, organizations must develop strategies for specifically addressing these two challenges.

Spanish Language Accommodations

Spanish is the fourth most spoken language in the world, with over 550 million speakers globally. In the United States, 41 million people [speak Spanish](#) as a native language, and another 11 million speak it as a second language. This makes the U.S. the country with the second-largest population of Spanish speakers in the world, behind only Mexico. Unsurprisingly, most American Spanish speakers are Latino or Hispanic, with 75% of Latinos possessing a [high level of fluency](#) in Spanish.



In catering to the unique needs of Latino and Hispanic Americans, companies must consider Spanish language accessibility a top priority. These accommodations should go beyond minimal gestures that merely signal support without providing it. For example, while many U.S. businesses display bilingual signage for essential information, few offer employees or customers the ability to engage with the organization fully in Spanish.

Spanish Language Inclusivity in Action

One organization seeking to push Spanish language support forward is Wells Fargo (No. 15 on the 2024 Top Companies for Latino Executives list and [No. 23](#) on the 2024 Top 50 Companies list). During the development of Fargo, the company's virtual assistant, Wells Fargo worked with its Latino ERNs (employee resource networks) to integrate multiple Spanish dialects into Fargo's functionality. Speaking at Fair360's [2024 Top 50 event](#), Kristy Fercho, Head of Diverse Segments, Representation and Inclusion, described the development process.

"One of our developers said, 'What are we doing for our Spanish-speaking customer base?' Twenty-eight percent of our customer base is Spanish-only, and 58% is Spanish-preferred," Fercho said. "We rolled out the first-ever virtual assistant in Spanish: Fargo en Español. It was a great example of how business connects with DEI to solve the needs of our customers."

In a [press release](#) announcing the rollout of Fargo en Español, Wells Fargo emphasized how Spanish language accessibility is a core part of developing an organizational culture that is specifically inclusive of Latino and Hispanic Americans.

“Offering a Spanish-language capability that can provide details and context about a customer’s financial journey—to the same extent the English-language solution can—improves accessibility to our growing Latino customer base,” the company said. “To ensure the Spanish-language capability is as comprehensive as possible, Wells Fargo leveraged the knowledge of its Spanish-speaking employees representing over a dozen Spanish-speaking countries to test, train and fine-tune Fargo to understand a number of different regional language differences and dialects.”

Initiatives like Fargo en Español demonstrate how companies can go beyond a broad-strokes approach to fairness and inclusion by instead developing a DEI strategy that targets the specific needs of segmented populations.

Employing Undocumented Workers

The American immigration system and processes for obtaining work authorization disproportionately affect Latino and Hispanic communities. It should be noted that the overwhelming majority of Latino Americans are documented residents or citizens. Eighty-one percent of all Latino Americans are U.S. citizens, which includes 41% of foreign-born Latino Americans. However, of the 11 million undocumented individuals living in the U.S., data from the [Migration Policy Institute](#) shows that 75% are of Central or South American origin. Nearly 80% of these individuals have lived in the U.S. for five years or more, and over 5.5 million are under the age of 35. As such, undocumented Latino workers make up a significant portion of the U.S. workforce, yet they face constant barriers to securing and maintaining long-term employment.

While there is a widespread perception that undocumented immigrants are not legally able to work in the U.S., the barriers to employment these individuals face are often matters of employer awareness, not legality. In reality, there are multiple pathways for organizations to legally hire or contract

work from undocumented individuals. What prevents these individuals from obtaining work is the failure of organizations to understand the employment processes for such persons.

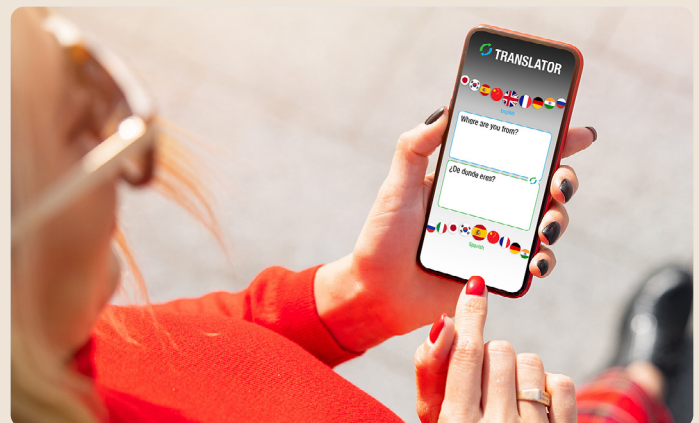
Undocumented Status and Work Authorization

Many companies may conflate immigration status with work authorization, though the two are not synonymous. An undocumented person can still have a right to work in the U.S., which allows them to go through the same hiring process as a U.S. citizen or documented resident.

“If you have work authorization as an undocumented person, pretty much every industry is legally open to you,” said Cassandra Liss, a Graduate Assistant for Undocumented Student Services at Rutgers University – Newark.

Work authorization often supersedes immigration status as a matter of employment legality. If a job candidate can prove they have that work authorization, their immigration status becomes irrelevant as it pertains to an organization’s ability to hire them.

“In terms of the employer process, with work authorization, no one should be asking anyone’s immigration status,” said Liss. “If they have work authorization and a social security number, that should not be coming up.”



Independent Contractors

Even without work authorization, organizations can still solicit work from undocumented individuals through other means. Independent contractors, for example, don't have to provide proof of work authorization the same way that W-2 employees do.

"A big thing that I think employers can look at is what jobs can be done by an independent contractor? In fact, for employers, you don't have to pay benefits, you don't usually have to provide equipment or things like that, so it can really be beneficial," Liss said.

Many work opportunities can be contract or stipend-based, allowing undocumented workers to build successful careers with established organizations. Companies that are willing to transition W-2 positions into contractor opportunities can thus be more inclusive of the needs of undocumented individuals.

"I spend a lot of time trying to let people know that you can have, say, student workers who are undocumented without work authorization," Liss said. "They just have to be paid differently, and some wording may have to be different...The payment process looks a bit different.", but it's still relatively easy."

Educational Resources

One of the most effective strategies for supporting undocumented communities is that of education. In the face of misinformation and a lack of understanding of the issues surrounding undocumented employees, organizations should take steps to educate themselves on the proper processes for recruiting, employing and contracting these workers.

The following resources can serve as a starting point for companies to improve their understanding of issues facing undocumented Americans:

Fellowships and Other Non-Employment Based - Opportunities for Undocumented Students

The Dream - Business Resources

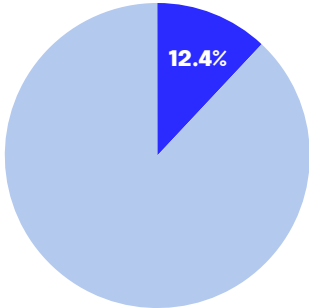
A Guide to ITINs, EINs and Taxes

"There are a lot of really great workers and skilled individuals within the undocumented community who do have work authorization and those who don't. It is possible to integrate them into the workforce; it just takes more time," Liss said. "What are employers ready and willing to do?"

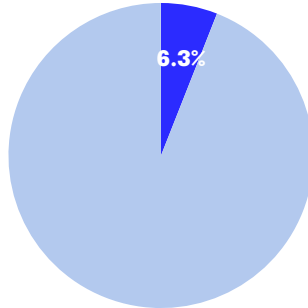


Facts and Figures

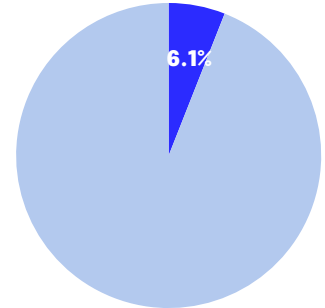
Representation at Top 50 Companies



12.4% of employees at **Top 50** companies identify as Latino or Hispanic
Source: Fair360

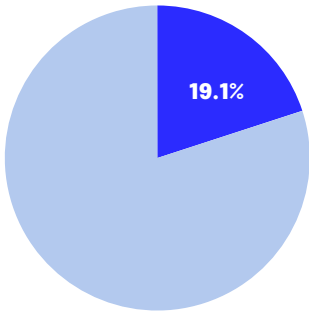


6.3% of men at **Top 50** companies identify as Latino or Hispanic
Source: Fair360

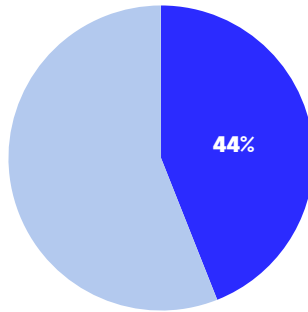


6.1% of women at **Top 50** companies identify as Latino or Hispanic
Source: Fair360

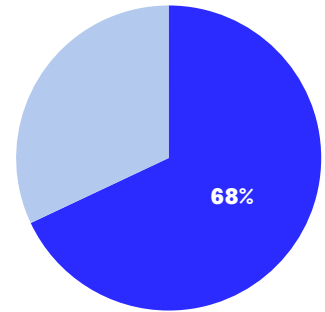
Hispanic and Latinos in the United States



63.7 million Americans, **19.1%** of the population, identify as Latino or Hispanic
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

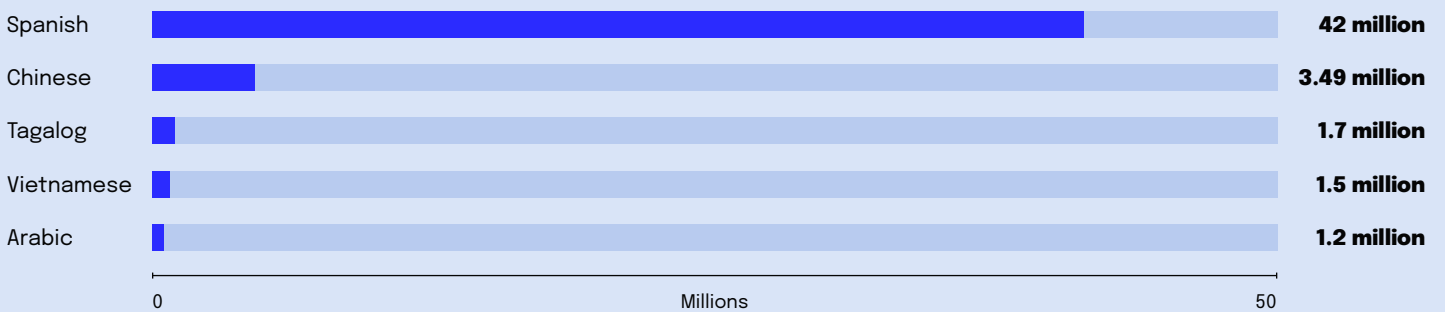


44% of U.S. immigrants migrate from Latino/Hispanic countries
Source: Migration Policy Institute



68% of Latino Americans were born in the U.S., while **32%** immigrated from outside the country
Source: Migration Policy Institute

Top 5 Languages Spoken in the US Beyond English



Source: U.S. Department of State

Timeline: Hispanic and Latino History

1859: The establishment of cigar factories in Florida, Louisiana and New York attracted Cuban workers to the U.S.

1865: Philip Bazaar became the first Hispanic Congressional Medal of Honor recipient.

1880-1900: The Hispanic population in the U.S. grew from 333,000 to 496,000, with the majority being U.S.-born.

1910: The Mexican Revolution began, leading to significant migration to the U.S.

1914: The Panama Canal officially opened on August 15, completed at the cost of more than \$350 million.



1929-1939: The U.S. conducted large-scale deportations of Mexican and Mexican American residents. Roughly 355,000 to 2 million people were deported, 60% of whom were first-generation U.S. citizens of Mexican descent, mainly children.

1942: World War II drastically changed U.S. views and policies toward Mexican immigration. The Bracero Program was established between the U.S. and Mexico to encourage Mexicans to come to the U.S. as contract workers to support wartime industries.

1947: The *Mendez v. Westminster* case led to the prohibition of segregation of Mexican American students in California public schools.

1952: Puerto Rico proclaimed its constitution and was approved by the United States Congress, officially establishing a formal government structure to include a legislative branch, an elected governor and a judicial system based on civil liberties.



1954: The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Hernandez v. State of Texas* that Mexican Americans have equal protection under the law.

1962: César Chávez and Dolores Huerta founded the National Farm Workers Association.

1964: The Civil Rights Act of 1964 outlawed discrimination based on race, sex, religion, color or national origin. The act, signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, also created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to enforce federal job discrimination laws.

1965: The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 was signed, ending the quota system based on country of origin.

1973: Miami recognized Spanish as its second official language.

1975: The Voting Rights Act of 1975 made bilingual ballots a requirement in many areas.

1980: Fidel Castro announced that any Cuban who wished to leave may do so. Shortly after, Cuban Americans sailed from South Florida to the port of Mariel in droves to help those who wanted to leave, an event often referred to as the Mariel Boatlift. Over a period of five months, more than 125,000 Cubans arrived in South Florida.



1986: The Immigration Reform and Control Act was signed, granting legal status to 2.7 million immigrants.

1989: Ileana Ros-Lehtinen became the first Hispanic woman elected to Congress.

1990: Antonia C. Novello became the first woman and Hispanic surgeon general of the U.S.

1993: Ellen Ochoa became the first Hispanic woman to go to space.

2001: The first version of the Development, Relief and Education for Alien Minors (DREAM) Act was proposed.

2003: Hispanics became the nation's largest minority group yet remained underrepresented in workforce leadership.

2007: America Ferrera won Outstanding Lead Actress in a Comedy Series for "Ugly Betty."

2009: Sonia Sotomayor became the first Latina Supreme Court Justice.

Richard Gonzalez became the CEO of AbbVie, achieving status as one of the highest-paid CEOs without completing a college degree.

2012: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) began under President Obama, providing work permits and deferred action from deportation for undocumented youth.

2017: "Day Without Immigrants" protests highlighted the contributions of immigrants to the U.S. economy.

Geisha Williams became the first Latina Fortune 500 CEO.

2018: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez became the youngest woman ever to serve in the U.S. Congress.



2019: Cardi B won the Grammy for Best Rap Album, the first solo female rapper to do so.

2020: The Supreme Court blocked efforts to end DACA, allowing 700,000 young immigrants to work and study in the U.S. without fear of deportation.

In 2020, 18.7 million voters (about 1 in 10) were of Latin American descent, with a historic 53.7% of the Hispanic population eligible to vote. For the first time in U.S. presidential history, U.S.-born Latinos voted at the same rate as naturalized citizens.



2021: U.S. Census Data revealed that the Hispanic and white populations in Texas are now on par, not including undocumented immigrants. This marked a demographic shift, with Hispanics emerging as the majority among voters and consumers.

2022: The U.S. Census Bureau reported that the Latino population surpassed 60 million, making up 18.9% of the total U.S. population.

2023: Edward Caban was named NYPD commissioner, becoming the first Latino to lead the nation's largest police department.

Patricia Guerrero was sworn in as the Chief Justice of the California Supreme Court, making her the court's first Latina chief justice.



2024: The number of Hispanic eligible voters has increased to a projected 36.2 million in November 2024, which is a 153% increase since 2000.





- How can our organization better accommodate Spanish-speaking employees and customers?
- What steps can our organization take to ensure inclusivity and support for undocumented workers?
- How can our organization address health disparities and advance health equity within the Hispanic and Latino communities?
- Considering the intersections of health and entrepreneurship, how can we, as an organization, support Hispanic and Latino entrepreneurs within our community to address both health disparities and economic development needs?
- How do you think the historical events highlighted in the Hispanic Heritage Month timeline have influenced the experiences of Hispanic and Latino individuals in the United States today?
- What implications do you think historical shifts in Latino American demographics have for businesses and organizations in terms of diversity, inclusion and engagement with the Latino community?
- In what ways can organizations leverage the increased political engagement and demographic changes among the Hispanic population to better address their needs and preferences within the workforce and marketplace?
- How do you feel our workplace celebrates or acknowledges Hispanic Heritage Month, and do you have any suggestions for improvement or additional ways to recognize the contributions of Hispanic and Latino individuals?
- Considering the gains in education, employment and earnings for Hispanic and Latino women in the last several decades, what initiatives or support systems do you think organizations can implement to further promote their advancement and success in the workplace?
- How do you think employers can create a supportive and inclusive environment that addresses the specific concerns of Latino and Hispanic employees and fosters open dialogue about issues affecting these communities?