

# **JUSTICE and HEALTH:**

Challenges to the Latino/a Family





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**T**he two parts of this booklet aim to help Latino/a families. This booklet wants to help you to best support your LGBTQ<sup>1</sup> family members as they seek to lead the full lives that God intends for them.

Each of the two parts is guided by the Christian values of love, the dignity of every person, social justice, inclusion, acceptance, and human rights.

While many people see civil rights as simply a legal matter, we see the civil and legal rights for our LGBTQ family members as an indispensable context and requirement for them to live full social, cultural, religious and political lives in the Latino/a community and in the wider society.

Laws have consequences, and in this booklet we highlight the positive effects of laws on our children and teenagers when full civil and human rights are guaranteed our LGBTQ family members, as well as the negative effects when those rights are not granted and guaranteed.

We focus on two key issues that many Latino/a families face:

- 1) How to bring up Latino/a LGBTQ children and teenagers in our families, churches, schools and communities, in order to help them experience full lives.
- 2) The challenges of substance abuse and of HIV/AIDS facing our LGBTQ Latino/a teenagers.

We hope that each of the three parts of this booklet will inspire you to spiritually and emotionally support your LGBTQ family members. We hope to also encourage you to become involved and actively support the political and legal efforts to guarantee healthy futures for all our LGBTQ loved ones.

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<sup>1</sup> LGBTQ are initials that stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer. Together they represent the internal diversity and richness of this community. See also the *Vocabulary* that is another booklet published by a Latino/a Roundtable of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry.

# First Part



## CHRISTIAN APPROACHES FOR BRINGING UP HEALTHY GAY, LESBIAN, AND TRANSGENDER LATINO/A CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS

### A) Christian foundations of equality and justice.

In the Bible it says that the central command of Jesus is “to love one another as I have loved you” (John 13: 34). In the early Christian community the disciples strived to live as a community of equals. As St. Paul wrote to the Galatians: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3: 28). It is clear that *equality is a fundamental principle of the Christian faith and community.*

Yet it is often a real challenge to put equality into practice, especially for people who have been marginalized in society.

We know from history that slavery was practiced by many Christians. History also shows that women were denied (by Christians) many basic rights, such as property rights, voting and full citizenship, and a right to separate from or make claims against abusive husbands. Christians have also socially marginalized other Christians not from their same race, culture or ethnic group. And we know that many Christians do not see gay, lesbian, and transgender persons as equal citizens or as their fellow Christians.

All these examples show us that Christians have not always taken Jesus’ command to love seriously, and have not treated their brothers and sisters equally. History shows us that, unfortunately, very many Christians have failed to live up to the first and most important of all commandments.

Since the 1800s, a growing number of Christian denominations have insisted that social justice is part of the teaching and doctrine of the Church. This teaching on social justice was built upon the basic principles of the Christian life: to love one another, to treat all people with equal dignity and respect, and to work to create a more equal and just society.

The early teaching on social justice focused on the rights of factory workers to a just pay and to organize labor unions. Over last two centuries Christian social teaching has been developed to include (for example) the rights of people to organize politically and to have civil associations in order to make sure that governments treat all people with dignity. Since the 1960s Christian social teaching expanded to also include the idea and struggles for “human rights,” “the option for the poor,” and “the option for the most vulnerable.”

Jesus’ life was one of reaching out to the poorest and most vulnerable members of his society: the blind, the lame, lepers, women, outsiders, foreigners, etc. As a consequence, Christians today must also reach out to and defend the poorest and most

vulnerable in our societies. In doing this we are following Jesus.

Protestant, Evangelical, Pentecostal and Catholic communities share these biblical values. Jesus gave us the example to accept people as they are. We are called to bring love, hope, and healing to all—especially those that do not have the same capacities or resources to live full lives. Today Jesus would be reaching out to our children—especially to those children going through their struggles to find love and acceptance as gay, lesbian, and transgender persons in a society that is often very cruel to them, and that denies them full and loving acceptance in their families and communities.

Christian social justice teaching calls us to:

- Respect the dignity of every human person
- Defend the most vulnerable of our brothers and sisters, and promote social solidarity
- Care for, respect and defend the whole person and not just some parts of a person
- Defend basic rights for employment, housing, education and freedom of association
- Support family life, especially the development of children to realize their full human potential in the context of supportive, loving and forgiving parents
- Defend the rights of all, and especially of children, of the poor and the vulnerable, to live in safety without fear

As a consequence of these evident Christian principles, Christians are called to support our gay, lesbian, and transgender family members as a human rights issue in society, in our congregations and denominations, and in our families.

Christian social teaching is a direct consequence and development of the teaching, ministry and example of Jesus, as clearly witnessed to us by the Bible.

## **B) Caring for the whole person.**

The idea of “care for the whole person” is intimately connected to Christian teaching on social justice.

Although “caring for the whole person” is an idea that originally came from the (also Christian) educational principle that emphasizes that it is never enough to just teach information, it has come to emphasize that every person—no matter how young—should be treated with dignity, be allowed to develop her/his conscience as well as his/her intellectual, emotional, and creative capacities. Everyone should be encouraged to develop to her/his full potential, to realize his/her vocation in the world, and to discover that all of us are responsible for our world and for each other.

The development of this educational principle into one of the key components of Christian teaching on social justice is particularly important as we think about the children who have special needs, and those who are culturally different from the majority, and still those who are developing sexual and emotional attraction to their own sex, as well as their own gender identities.

**C) Seven goals (and necessary legal rights) for bringing up healthy LGBTQ Latino/a children:**

The guiding principle of the following seven goals is that legal rights and protections allow people to live full lives. Therefore, after each set of family-centered recommendations, and after the statement of each goal, we have included the legal rights that we must seek and defend in our society—so that our LGBTQ children and teenager will grow healthily into adulthood and find happiness in their lives.

Children growing up who think that they will not have full rights and protections when they are adults will grow up without a vision and a plan to mature and develop into full equal citizens and community members.

When children see that just because they are LGBTQ they will have limited rights and protections, they will not have reason to be responsible, finish school, plan a career or vocation, and form positive relationships.

Limited rights lead to limited lives. And limited lives often lead to developmental problems reflected in alcohol and substance abuse, lack of ability to form mutual relationships and friendships, and lack of responsibility to fulfill obligations.

Rights help provide children with a trajectory or path to future responsible lives. Rights also help responsible people with jobs, healthy families, and active participation in church, community, and society.

Here are the seven goals (and necessary legal rights and protections) for bringing up healthy Latino/a children:

**1. To develop the whole person at home:**

- Bringing each new child into the family requires that family members understand that every child is an individual person who will have his or her own hopes and dreams.
- All family members should understand that every person is a child of God, made in God's image and likeness, and must be allowed to develop in his or her own way.
- It is very important that every child feels and experiences inclusion and acceptance in the life of her/his Latino/a family.
- Families sometimes do not accept their children as each child is. These non-accepting families provide the context for their children's alienation (during childhood and teenagers). A Latino/a child or young person who feels alienated can develop negative behavioral and attitudinal patterns that may often be lifelong issues.
- GOAL: A united Latino/a family in which every member is accepted and celebrated, as each family member is, so that every member can contribute in a positive manner to the family and society.

- LEGAL RIGHTS REQUIRED BY LATINO/A LGBTQ CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS, TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:
  - Employment non-discrimination
  - Housing non-discrimination
  - Civil marriage equality
  - Ability to have and/or adopt children
  - Equal access to nutrition and health care

## **2. To develop the whole person at school:**

- Every child should develop in school to his/her full potential.
- Every child should be respected as an individual by teachers, school administrators and fellow students.
- Schools should provide healthy environments and safe spaces for all children, so they will want to stay in school and complete their education through high school.
- Unhealthy school environments—plagued by bullying, intolerance, violence, insensitive teachers and administrators, and negative peer pressure—provide excuses for some LGBTQ teenagers to drop out of school or develop behaviors that may lead to drugs, alcohol, and physical violence.
- GOAL: To create and support a learning environment in which every child can develop his/her full intellectual, critical, and creative talents.
- LEGAL RIGHTS REQUIRED BY LATINO/A LGBTQ CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS, TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:
  - Equal access to education.
  - Equal access to nutrition and health care.
  - Safe school environments, and supportive teachers and administrators.

## **3. To develop the whole person in the faith community:**

- It is important to learn about a God who is love and who always loves everyone. It is also important to learn about Jesus as teacher, friend, companion, good shepherd, person of inclusion, etc.
- To experience unconditional love in the faith community, and in the social life of the faith community, is crucial if children and teenagers are to learn that God's children are all equal and that God loves everyone without limits, conditions or exceptions.

- Many Christians often say that “God does not make junk”—that insight should be applied to all the members of the faith community.
- Hurtful and non-accepting faith communities often provide the context for children and teenagers to abandon religion, or to view religion as their enemy.
- GOAL: We should try to form or belong to a Christian community that lives its faith in love and acceptance of all of God’s children, respecting and affirming all community members through inclusive worship, leadership, activities, and service.
- LEGAL RIGHTS REQUIRED BY LATINO/A LGBTQ CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS, TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:
  - End to discrimination in membership, services, employment, etc.
  - Active promotion of full equality and inclusion in the life of the faith community and society.

#### **4. To develop the whole person in the wider community:**

- As children develop, they want to join groups and activities—especially sports, music, dance, theater, etc.
- Children should only be part of community activities that have inclusive membership standards and guard against bullying and the formation of cliques. We do not want to insist that our children participate in activities that will expose them to harm, violence or offense.
- Just as we want boys and girls to have equal opportunity, so should we expect inclusion of our LGBTQ children in clubs, teams and activity groups.
- Negative and non-inclusive community situations can lead children and teenagers to the belief that they are not accepted by society, which can lead to anti-social behaviors or attitudes that will then prevent them from joining healthy peer groups and organizations. Social isolation can also lead to depression and suicidal tendencies.
- GOAL: We should strive to develop and sustain an inclusive community, where all children and teenagers (regardless of who and what they are) may grow physically as well as emotionally, socially and culturally.
- LEGAL RIGHTS REQUIRED BY LATINO/A LGBTQ CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS, TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:
  - Equal membership access.
  - Equal access to extra-curricular activities and opportunities.

## **5. To develop the whole person in healthy and loving friendships:**

- Most children develop special or close friendships as they enter puberty and adolescence.
- The best way for children and teenagers to develop healthy relationships is for their families to get to know and accept their friends. And the best way to promote knowledge and acceptance is to encourage our children and teenagers to bring their friends into our family life. Only after this can we enter into a healthy and fruitful conversation with our children regarding their friendships.
- By allowing the friends of their children to feel at home—“mi casa es tu casa”—parents will know what their children are doing and build trust.
- Children and teenagers who are stopped from having special friendships often rebel against their parents, relatives, teachers and coaches— a rebellion that can lead to risky social situations and/or sexual behaviors, which may even lead to contraction of sexually transmitted diseases.
- GOAL: We should recognize that every person has the right to experience friendship and love. This is important because it is the way to one day meet our partners in life, with whom we will build a family and a home. We should, therefore, create a healthy and welcoming environment for all in our family.
- LEGAL RIGHTS REQUIRED BY LATINO/A LGBTQ CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS, TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:
  - Civil marriage equality.
  - Ability to have and/or adopt children.
  - Equal access to credit.

## **6. To develop the whole person in a vocation or career:**

- As the teenager looks to high school graduation he/she looks to the future.
- Teenagers who have had healthy family, school, faith community and societal experiences will develop their personality, talents, and hopes.
- Overall healthy, inclusive and supportive relationships and contexts during their teen years will move them to the next stage in college, in the military or in vocational training.
- Unhealthy or abusive family, school, faith community and societal experiences can lead to pessimism, depression and low-self esteem—complicating or derailing what could have been a trajectory to vocational or professional success.
- GOAL: We should provide supportive, inclusive and healthy family, school, faith community and societal experiences for our LGBTQ children and teenagers, and

encourage them to realize their full potential and their hopes in a professional career or vocation.

- LEGAL RIGHTS REQUIRED BY LATINO/A LGBTQ CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS, TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:
  - Educational and employment non-discrimination
  - Right to serve one's country in the military, or in teaching, health care, and social services.

## **7. To develop the whole person as a citizen with rights:**

- Civil and human rights are necessary for each person to develop. Respect for the rule of law is fostered by civil and human rights.
- Rights make possible real-life possibilities: finishing school, getting a job, forming friendships and families.
- Rights provide protection: if discrimination occurs, there is a way to seek justice.
- Rights unite citizens and other members of civil society, because all of us live by the same codes and are all equal under the same law.
- However, children and teenagers who do not feel that they have the same full rights of others can develop anti-social or criminal behaviors.
- GOAL: We should work to guarantee the same full legal rights for all people in our community, so that our children and teenagers may develop as law-abiding citizens who are contributing to a better society for all.
- LEGAL RIGHTS REQUIRED BY LATINO/A LGBTQ CHILDREN AND TEENAGERS, TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL:
  - Inclusive non-discriminatory laws protecting and covering sexual orientation and gender identity, and the expression of both.

## **D) What can we do as Latino/a family members to help our LGBTQ loved ones?**

- Talk with your child or teenager about her/his LGBTQ identity.
- Express affection when your child or teenager tells you he/she is LGBTQ, or when you learn that your child or teenager is LGBTQ.
- Support your child's or teenager's LGBTQ identity even though you may feel uncomfortable. Learn about his/her sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Defend and advocate for your child or teenager when he/she is mistreated because of her/his LGBT identity

- Insist that other family members respect your LGBTQ child or teenager.
- Bring your child or teenager to LGBTQ organizations or events, and participate with her/him as much as possible.
- Connect your child or teenager with a healthy LGBTQ adult role model, to show your child or teenager that there are healthy and successful options for the future.
- Work to make your faith community supportive of all LGBTQ members and families, or find a supportive faith community that welcomes your entire family (including, therefore, your LGBTQ child or teenager).
- Welcome your child's or teenager's LGBTQ friends (and your LGBTQ teenager's "significant other," if there is one) to your home and to family events and activities.
- Support your child's or teenager's gender identity expression.
- Believe that your child or teenager can have a happy future as an LGBTQ adult.

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**IF YOU WANT TO READ MORE, THE MAIN SOURCES WE USED FOR THE FIRST PART WERE:**

"Family Rejection as a Predictor of Negative Health Outcomes in White and Latino Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults." By Caitlin Ryan, David Huebner, Rafael M. Diaz and Jorge Sanchez, in: *Pediatrics* (2009, n. 123), 346-352.

*Supportive Families, Healthy Children: Helping Families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Children.* By Caitlin Ryan (San Francisco: Family Acceptance Project, San Francisco State University. 2009).

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**SOME ORGANIZATIONS THAT YOU MIGHT WANT TO CONTACT:**

**1. Centers that serve the LGBTQ community:**

- National directory of LGBTQ Centers / [www.lgbtcenters.org/Centers/find-a-center.aspx](http://www.lgbtcenters.org/Centers/find-a-center.aspx)
- **In** Chicago – The Center on Halstead, [www.centeronhalsted.org](http://www.centeronhalsted.org)
- **In/en** Los Angeles – Los Angeles Gay & Lesbian Center, [www.lagaycenter.org](http://www.lagaycenter.org) or [www.laglc.org](http://www.laglc.org)
- **In/en** New York City (Nueva York) – The Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center, [www.gaycener.org](http://www.gaycener.org)
- **In/en** San Diego – The San Diego LGBT Community Center, [www.thecentersd.org](http://www.thecentersd.org)

## 2. Other organizations:

- PFLAG – Parents, Families, & Friends of Lesbians and Gays, [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)
- CLGS – Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry, [www.clgs.org](http://www.clgs.org)
- WPATH -- World Professional Association for Transgender Health, [www.wpath.org](http://www.wpath.org)

## 3. Faith-based organizations:

- Dignity (Roman Catholic) – [www.dignityusa.org](http://www.dignityusa.org)
- Integrity (Episcopal) – [www.integrityusa.org](http://www.integrityusa.org)
- Lutherans Concerned (Lutheran- ELCA) – [www.lcna.org](http://www.lcna.org)
- Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) – [www.mcccchurch.org](http://www.mcccchurch.org)
- LGBT & SGL ministries (United Church of Christ) - <http://www.ucc.org/lgbt/>

# Second Part



## THE CHALLENGES OF BULLYING, SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND HIV/AIDS FACING OUR LATINO/A LGBTQ YOUTH

Latino/a gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) young people are often harassed or bullied because of their sexual orientation. Our children and teenagers can also be bullied because of language or accent, race or color of skin, ethnic origin, religion, physical disability, weight or height.

It is important to create a safe place in our schools, in our churches and in our families, to support young people who are struggling with their sexual identity. You can help build that safe space by promoting conversations about how each of us is born as a unique child of God, and how each of us has the same dignity and rights as others.

It is also important to recognize, within every one of our families, that even if we do not understand why our children are LGBTQ, they remain our children! So we must listen to them, love them and respect them.

In every community throughout our nation, there is bullying against LGBTQ kids. Sometimes incidents of bullying and other hate crimes are reported, but most of the time they are not. While physical violence is clearly an act of bullying, most of the times bullying takes place verbally through name calling and insults, through texting and email

messaging, on the internet (through Facebook and other social networks), and through abusive relationships.

Many times our children's spirit is further damaged by how people in our congregations speak about and treat LGBTQ persons. Many Latino/a teenagers do poorly in school as a result of bullying, and yet not all teachers know how to handle the name-calling that our kids may experience.

For more information on bullying visit the following web sites:

**Latino Briefs Digest:**

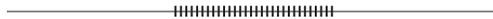
<http://ucanr.org/blogs/blogcore/postdetail.cfm?postnum=5587>

**Safe Schools Healthy Students:**

<http://sshs.promoteprevent.org/publications/prevention-briefs/preventing-bullying-schools-and-community>

**Stop Out Bullying:**

<http://www.stompoutbullying.org/>



Young LGBTQ persons face unique health challenges in their lives. When young people are not raised in settings that are safe, respectful and loving, they face many health risks.

In addition, as Latinos/as we often ignore information about health and healthy living because we are taught at a very early age that we should not go to seek medical care unless we are extremely sick.

There are several important components that help create a safe and healthy environment for our young people. One of these important components is the need to maturely integrate the various dimensions of our identity and lives. We need to integrate the several elements that jointly make us be ourselves. So, for example, sexual orientation and gender identity, race and ethnicity, etc., must all healthily come together in our individual identities.

A well-balanced and integrated person will avoid substance abuse, unsafe sexual behaviors, etc. Because substance abuse and unsafe sexual behaviors place our young people at risk for HIV, Hepatitis C and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Substance abuse is often the tool that many kids use in order to deal with homophobia, racism, and their families' lack of support and acceptance.

As our Latino/a young people "come out of the closet," they are at risk for many health concerns. And because Latinos/as come from different communities and cultures, we don't always view good and healthy living in the same way. Nevertheless, the risks and health problems are the same.

Our young LGBTQ people share many of the same problems as those who are heterosexual. The difference for the LGBTQ youth is that they are brought up in a world where their sexuality is not supported by society, and where it is rarely openly discussed or accepted in their families.

Latino/a LGBTQ young people are taught, from a very early age, that they should not talk about certain subjects. And among those “forbidden” subjects are sex, sexuality, cancer, mental illness, alcoholism, drug abuse, and obesity (just to name a few).

All of us probably remember that while we were growing up our parents told us: “whatever is said between these four walls (of our homes) must stay between these four walls.” Or: “don’t talk too loud, because we don’t want our neighbors knowing the business of our family.” We were raised expecting much to be silenced or not discussed openly. Our cultures teach us to shy away from certain topics that may bring about shame, denial, silence or stigma. This cultural norm of silence or topic-avoidance can lower anyone’s self-esteem, and can place our LGBTQ young people at risk because they are neither allowed to ask nor be informed about unhealthy behaviors.

The cultural norm of topic-avoidance or silence can have devastating results in depression, suicide, homelessness, substance abuse, etc. HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) can also enter a young person’s life as a consequence of family and community silences.

Young LGBTQ Latinos/as often find themselves in highly stressful situations. “Coming out” to family members is not easy among Latinos/as. But more difficult is “coming out” to ourselves. It is not easy for many.

In addition to our own “coming out” process young Latinos/as also face problems at home. Some of these problems may include substance abuse in parents, or domestic violence, or family members arguing, or unemployment, or lack of affordable housing, or undocumented immigration status, or an overbearing parent, or an abusive sibling... or a combination of these problems.

Self-image can also be a problem for young Latino/a LGBTQ persons, and lack of LGBTQ and/or Latino/a role models in society and in families may be a further complication.

In hiding who they are as LGBTQ Latinos/as, our young people often lose their self-identity and their sense of dignity. They may start to question whether they might be too, or not enough, “masculine” or “feminine.” They may also have a poor body image of themselves. All of this, of course, contributes to low self-esteem.

High school-age LGBTQ Latinos/as are three times more likely to commit suicide than heterosexual students, and will engage in drug and alcohol abuse, and cigarette smoking, at a higher rate than their heterosexual peers.

For more information go to:

**Youth Pride INC.**

<http://www.youthprideri.org/Resources/Statistics/tabid/227/Default.aspx>

## About.com Depression

<http://depression.about.com/od/Help/a/LGBT-Youth.htm>



Latinos/as continue to be heavily impacted by HIV/AIDS. Today there are approximately 1.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S., and over 250,000 of them are Latino/a. The states with the largest concentrations of persons with HIV and AIDS are New York and California.

HIV today is no longer a death sentence for Latinos/as. Once a person becomes positive, they can still live a very long, happy and productive life. But, HIV usually calls for a change in living habits. Persons who are positive need to eat and live well, doing more physical exercise to help relieve stress in their daily lives. They also need to limit—and in most cases avoid—the use of alcohol and cigarettes, and avoid drug use altogether.

Those who have become HIV positive are also prescribed a rigid drug therapy. The medication is designed to slow the spread of the virus, to contain it, and often to kill virus cells. No one has been known to “be cured” of HIV or AIDS. You might hear that in some people HIV is “non-detected”: this means that the virus is not currently found in their blood (after blood tests), but the HIV virus always remains in those people’s muscle mass. That is why HIV is not completely curable, but it can be contained.

HIV and AIDS are not an “LGBTQ disease.” Anyone can contract the HIV virus and, if untreated, can develop AIDS. HIV/AIDS usually appear in people who are not careful, but it doesn’t follow or require a sexual orientation or gender identity. Within the LGBTQ community gay or bisexual men are more likely to be positive than lesbian women. The rates are increasing for the transgender community.

The following are the most common ways to contract HIV:

1. Having vaginal or anal sex without a condom with someone who is already infected.
2. Having contact with the blood of someone who has HIV. This could include having a blood transfusion from someone who is infected with HIV.
3. A mother who has HIV can pass it on to her baby: HIV can pass to the baby during pregnancy, during the birth of the baby, or through breast-feeding. However, only about one in three babies born to HIV-positive mothers get HIV.
4. Receiving an injection from an unsterilized needle that was previously used by someone with HIV.

A number of factors contribute to the spread of HIV in Latino/a communities:

1. Behavioral risk factors for HIV differ by country of origin. Data suggest that the highest percentages of diagnosed HIV infections among Latino men are attributed

to sexual contact with other men, regardless of place of birth. But men born in Puerto Rico have a substantially higher rate of diagnosed HIV infections than Latino men who were born elsewhere—the higher rate of HIV infection among Puerto Rican men is attributed to injection drugs.

2. Latino/a men and women are most likely to be infected with HIV as a result of sexual contact with men. Latina women may be unaware of their male partners' sexual behavior and risk-taking.
3. Injection drug use continues to be a risk factor for Latinos/as, particularly those living or born in Puerto Rico. In addition, both casual and chronic substance users (among Latinos/as) may be more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, such as unprotected sex, when they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
4. The presence of some sexually transmitted infections (STIs) can significantly increase one's chances of contracting HIV. And a person who has both HIV and some STIs has a greater chance of infecting others with HIV. The rates of STIs remain high among Latinos/as.
5. Cultural factors may affect the risk of HIV infection. Some Latinos/as, for example, may avoid seeking testing, counseling or treatment out of fear of rejection by family and community, or out of fear of affecting their immigration status. Traditional gender roles, and the stigma surrounding homosexuality in Latino/a families and communities, may make it difficult for many Latinos/as to seek testing, treatment and counseling support.
6. Greater acculturation into U.S. culture has both negative (engaging in behaviors that increase the risk for HIV infection) and positive (communicating with partners about practicing safer sex) effects on the health behaviors of Latinos/as.
7. Socioeconomic factors such as poverty, lower educational attainment, inadequate health insurance, and limited access to health care, or language barriers, may add to Latino/a HIV infection rates.

Due to fear of deportation, undocumented immigrants may be less likely to access HIV prevention services, get an HIV test, or receive adequate treatment and care when living with HIV.

For more information, go to:

**Centers for Disease Control Website:** <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/latinos/index.htm>

**The Body: The Complete HIV/AIDS Resource**

<http://www.thebody.com/>

**Blog AIDS.gov**

<http://blog.aids.gov/2011/05/resource-to-help-in-addressing-hiv-among-latino-gay-men.html>





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