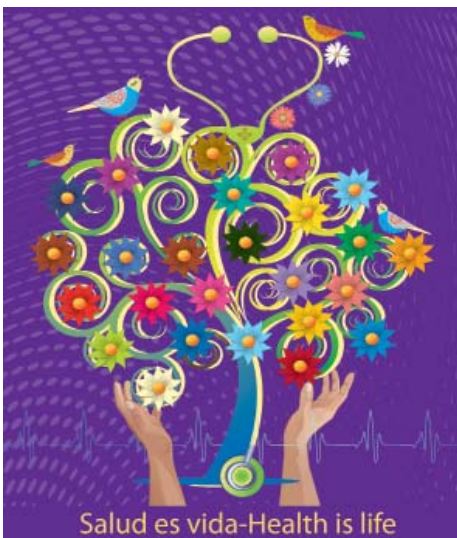




# BINATIONAL HEALTH WEEK: Health is Life



Throughout history, the United States has served as the primary destination of migrants world-wide; however, over time the profile of migrants has changed. Throughout the 1970s, two-thirds of immigrants to the U.S. were of European origin. Currently, about half of immigrants are of Latin American or Caribbean descent (nearly 20 million). Today, Latino migration to the U.S. has a positive economic and social impact. Latino immigration not only helps to offset the demographic aging of the US population, but Latino immigrants figure among the top five immigrant groups in 43 states. This population is concentrated between 18 and 64 years old and has high workforce participation, contributing to the country economically through work and consumption and socially through culture and community life.

Despite these significant contributions, Latino immigrants in the U.S. are often poorly integrated and face many challenges in terms of health and wellbeing. Not only are Latino naturalization rates far below those of other immigrant groups, but they are also more likely to have low incomes and live in poverty. These factors contribute to the lack of health insurance and access to services, and have serious consequences for their health in terms of chronic disease, life expectancy, and overall wellbeing. In response to these social inequities, the Affordable Care Act of 2010 extends public health programs to low-income individuals, many of them Latinos. However, legislation alone rarely manages to fully resolve societal injustices; much of the work of reducing disparities must take place at the community level.

One of those responses is what today we celebrate as Binational Health Week (BHW). BHW is comprised of health-promotion and health-education activities that take place throughout the U.S., Canada, and Mexico during the month of October. This annual campaign provides immigrant families with medical screenings, health-care referrals, treatment services, and information related to disease prevention.



## The Vision and Dedication of Many

Binational Health Week is one of the largest Latino health initiatives in North America. It was instituted 13 years ago by the Mexican government in conjunction with the Health Initiative of the Americas, a program of the UC Berkeley School of Public Health. BHW has been officially joined by the governments of six other Latin American countries: Guatemala, Honduras, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia. Other countries also participate locally. As a result, 133 consulates in the U.S. led 178 local taskforces to make BHW a successful reality this year.

During BHW, federal and state government agencies, community-based organizations, and thousands of volunteers come together to help the most underserved. This unique approach has provided the global leadership, and at the same time, the feeling of local belonging. The following table demonstrates the extraordinary growth and impact of BHW.

### Growth of Binational Health Week 2001-2013

Year	Countries	U.S. States/ Canadian Provinces	Number of Activities	Number of Services Offered	Number of People Reached	Number of Agencies	Number of Consulates
2001	2	1	98	N/A	18,720	115	4
2006	5	31/3	1,014	49,349	300,000	3,000	37
<b>2013</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>43/3</b>	<b>3,373</b>	<b>282,764</b>	<b>381,175</b>	<b>8,684</b>	<b>133</b>

### Health is Life



Under the slogan "Health is Life" the 13th Annual BHW took place from October 1-21, 2013, in the United States and Canada. Local planning committees estimate that almost 400,000 people benefitted from 3,373 activities realized by 8,684 agencies and 15,000 volunteers.

## The Health of the Migrant: A Multi-national Effort

As with many immigrant issues, binational collaboration is not only key to successful programs and initiatives such as BHW, but is also a shared responsibility towards underserved populations. This shared responsibility also serves to recognize the fact that health is a responsibility of both the country of origin and country of destination. This unique approach has mobilized networks, engaged policymakers, as well as integrated Latin culture and festivities with the common goal of promoting the health of Latinos and to increase the access to health services.



Latin American consulates provide resources for their respective populations in the U.S. Their leadership is pivotal in organizing BHW events; for example they:

- Convene meetings with agencies and task forces to plan the local calendar of activities.
- Facilitate and leverage financial support. Some governments provide economic and in-kind resources.
- Liaise with local authorities, media, educational institutions, and health providers.
- Report results and acknowledge the work of agencies and volunteers.

## Community-Level Expertise



The BHW social network has fostered innovation, alliances, and strategic partnerships that allow for collaboration between organizations nationwide. During the year, regional task forces meet to plan and prepare health promotion activities for BHW in their local area. Members of taskforces usually include consular representatives, community clinics, public health departments, community-based organizations, hometown associations, educational institutions, sports groups,

foundations, legislators, and local media representatives. As coordinator and leader of this movement, The Health Initiative of the Americas (HIA) encourages local action and provides nationwide dissemination of consistent and accurate information by producing population-specific health promotion materials, media campaigns, and other resources. HIA also provides guidance on fundraising, soliciting support from elected officials, developing an effective media campaign, and conducting local evaluations.

## Visit our Website!



HIA also maintains the BHW website. This website is a year-round resource for community organizations and BHW coordinators where they can find educational materials; directories of foundations, clinics, and community organizations; strategic planning and fundraising tools; resources for policy advocacy; and guidelines for conducting local evaluations and compiling activities reports.

- [www.binationalhealthweek.org](http://www.binationalhealthweek.org)
- [www.semanabinacionaldesalud.org](http://www.semanabinacionaldesalud.org)

## Capacity Building

Every year, BHW organizers spotlight specific topics that are either current health disparities in the Latino community or have a significant impact on the Latino community. The main health issues for 2013 were: The Health Care Reform in the U.S and Access to Health Care; Chronic Diseases including Obesity and Diabetes; Infectious Diseases including HIV and Tuberculosis; Occupational Health and Safety; and Mental Health.

This year HIA partnered with the Centers for Disease Control and prevention (CDC U.S. – Mexico Unit), the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and the National Public Health Information Coalition (NPHIC) to conduct a series of webinars that supported the planning of BHW in 2013. A total of five webinars were offered between May and September to BHW key partners. Each webinar consisted of two parts: the first part provided information about BHW logistics, including topics such as maintaining a calendar of events, how to submit funding requests, and using partner directories for community engagement. During the second part experts from CDC and other federal and state agencies provided information on the main health topics selected for BHW 2013, and guidance on where to access existing resources to educate and inform the Latino population. The purpose of the presentations was to improve the coordinators' ability to promote health among the communities they serve.

Population Served by Country of Origin	
Mexico	255,151
Guatemala	29,049
Honduras	16,035
Colombia	15,112
Ecuador	22,143
Perú	17,595
Bolivia	4,200
Other	21,890
<b>Total = 381,175</b>	

## From Grassroots to Public Policy and Advocacy



The official opening of the XIII Binational Health Week and the Binational Policy Forum on Migration and Global Health took place in Washington D.C. on October 1st. Three hundred and thirty-eight participants, including academics, health care providers, government officials, and members of non-governmental organizations, gathered to discuss the health issues that affect the Latino population. During this well-attended event, the National Population Council of Mexico (CONAPO), Mexico's Migration Policy Unit, the School of Public Health at the University of California Berkeley, and the Center for Health Policy Research at the University of California Los Angeles launched the newest report of the annually published series Health and Migration series, titled "Health and Migration: Mexican Immigrants in the United States."

At a more local level, BHW partners are encouraged to engage in public policy advocacy to raise awareness about the health challenges afflicting the underserved Latino population and signal these issues as political priorities. Elected officials

that participate in BHW activities receive information about real local health issues related to this specific population, as well as the efforts that local organizations are doing to reduce the gap of health and social inequalities. The engagement of elected officials in BHW empowers community members to participate in legislative changes.

## Conclusion

Like most people who need to leave their country in search of new opportunities, Latino immigrants come to the U.S. with hopes of improving their life situation and wellbeing. However, once they arrive, Latinos face special challenges related primarily to legal status and social integration that put their health and safety at risk. These challenges can be lessened by reducing barriers to health care. As a result, BHW was created as an alternative social movement that is dedicated to improving the living conditions of this vulnerable immigrant population.

During the last 13 years, BHW has grown in an unexpected exponential way, mobilizing thousands of volunteers and agencies in North America. As a result, BHW has led to an increase in awareness of challenges Latino immigrants face, improved quality of health education, and increased access to quality medical attention. Pursuing good health is the right of all human beings, and providing the means for realizing the right to health is thus a binational responsibility. After all, the health of a nation's immigrants represents the health of the nation itself.

## BHW 2013 Major National Partners



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