

PROYECTO PUENTE BINACIONAL DE SALUD

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POLICY BRIEF

Summary: An adherence of at least 95% is needed for HIV patients to maintain undetectable viral loads and to maintain appropriate levels of overall health. The Puente Binacional de Salud Project arises from the need make it easier for Mexicans in transit to continue their HIV medical treatment with as little interruptions as possible. The project's main goal is to create a website addressing the specific needs of HIV positive Mexican migrants in-transit; a website that can be used as a resource to help reduce the number of migrants who stop or interrupt their antiretroviral treatment due to travel and thereby reduce the risk of deterioration of their health status.

The resulting website offers an array of tools in both English and Spanish for patients and medical personnel that support the continuation of health plans of Mexicans in transit. The tools include legal descriptions of patient protection, forms for the exchange of information between both countries and their respective health sectors, as well as a variety of documents that facilitate access to health services, patient protection and repatriation of ill patients or human remains of Mexicans who passed away in the U.S. The Puente Binacional de Salud website can be found at <http://www.saluddelmigrante.org>.

Evaluation results show that a large number of individuals have accessed the website (704 visitors). Among those who visited the page, there are many who return. Also, among both new and returning visitors, there are many who visit more than one page. The evaluation of the webpage illustrates a very positive perspective on the usefulness of the page among the users which includes patients as well as medical and service providers. It seems that information offered on the website is responding to patient and service providers' needs. In addition, linkage and retention to care show promising preliminary results although the results on retention could be improved. The usefulness of the website needs to grow to accommodate the needs of the HIV-positive immigrants who are currently using the website. Additional funding is needed to ensure a number of additional features are added to the website as well as to ensure the website is kept up-to-date. We are currently seeking sources to find either a grant to hire someone to increase the website capabilities or a grant that would use pro bono technical advisers to do so. Increasing the usefulness of the website is a big task but we feel strongly that this project leads to the importance and potential life-saving characteristics of the Puente Binacional de Salud website. We divide our policy brief into sections which have recommendations for research, recommendations for community based organizations (CBOs) and health care service providers, and public policy recommendations.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1) Websites are great tools in transnational information and referral process as well as facilitating a continuum, and retention in HIV Care and perhaps in coordinating care for other medical conditions for immigrants or people in transit from one country to another. However, more research must be done to evaluate the effectiveness of websites in facilitating reciprocal communication among health teams in different countries when working with the same patient.
- 2) Coordinating health services for immigrants in transit utilizing digital tools in a transnational context could be a great support tool for continuum of care and retention in care; however, limited research has been done in intervention research in a dynamic model US-Latin America.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND HEALTH CARE SERVICE PROVIDERS

- 1) Information hosted in the Puente Binacional de Salud requires on-going, frequent updates to maintain accurate information about service provision and eligibilities.
- 2) Community Based Organization play a pivotal role in alerting and providing updated information to the website to keep information accurate.
- 3) Website evaluations are extremely important to inform updates and adjustments to the website. They can help guide the information needed on the website; however, many visitors to the website do not fill out the evaluation survey.
- 4) Individuals who provide services can complete the evaluation survey on behalf of their clients or contact the website administrator to notify them of any needed additions to the website.

PUBLIC POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Mexican Foreign Affairs offices such as the General Mexican Consulates in the United States and Canada, and the Ventanillas de Salud should be asked to link their information and referral process with the “Puente Binacional de Salud” website. These offices should also promote the utilization of the website among Consulate staff and Mexican visitors to the Consulates.
- 2) The United States Citizenship and Immigration Service (USCIS), should also provide links and information to the website. Mexican petitioners should be informed that they could access health services in both countries, and achieve continuum and retention in care. Information about the “Puente Binacional de Salud” website could be distributed in the USCIS and US Embassies in Mexico.
- 3) Human Rights Commissions in the United States and Mexico could distribute information about accessing health services while in transit from one country to another.
- 4) Mexican Immigration Services and Immigration States Programs in Mexico should inform immigrants about available health services in Mexico and the United States to support continuum of care and assure retention in care. The “Puente Binacional de Salud” website could be an information and referral portal offered to migrants in Mexican ports of entry.

- 5) Coordination of care for Mexicans in transit from Mexico to the United States and vice-versa should be promoted beyond the border areas. An expansion of the roles and goals of the California, New Mexico, Arizona, and Texas Border Health Commissions is necessary to assure continuum and retention in care for Mexican immigrants in transit beyond the US-Mexico regions.
- 6) Law initiatives need to be developed to instruct states in the United States and Mexico to implement administrative and service structures to facilitate the continuum and linkage to care for Mexican immigrants in transit in both countries. These policies and services should aim to assist immigrants with chronic, and manageable diseases in addition to those mandated by US and Mexican public health regulations.