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Colorado Latino Age Wave Community Assessment of Latino Older Adults

Summary of Key Findings

The community assessment identified several key findings, which help the Colorado Latino Age Wave better understand the Latino older adult population in metro Denver and inform its future work.

“For me, aging is a blessing, you have experienced a lot of things and learned a lot.”

Aging Trends in Colorado

- Looking specifically at Latino older adults in Colorado, **from 2000 to 2010, there was a 76.9 percent increase in Latino older adults (age 55 and older)** compared with a statewide increase of 51.9 percent for all races of the same age group.
- Based on forecasts produced by the State Demography Office, **the Latino population (all ages) in Colorado will continue to grow by 174 percent by 2030**, compared with a 31 percent projected growth rate for the white non-Hispanic population in the same time period.

Values, Beliefs, Feelings and Perceptions on Aging

- Latino older adults have positive perceptions on aging and appreciate the wisdom that comes with age. For them, **it is important to remain engaged and active, have good health, maintain independence, and have family support.**
- Latino older adults **value the role of family**, desire to help their family and the community, and want to age in place because of strong family connections.

Assets and Strengths of Latino Older Adults

- Latino older adults possess many strengths and assets, which are valuable resources for the Denver metropolitan area. These assets include: **strong commitment to family, resiliency, experience building coalitions, wisdom and knowledge, and a desire to remain active and engaged** (through volunteer work, exercise and activity, and employment).

Needs and Desires to Successfully Age in Community

- Latino older adults need **increased access to nutrition** (healthy foods), **healthcare** (local health services), **transportation** (many don't drive), and **adequate housing** (safe housing that accommodates physical limitations).
- They also want to have **opportunities to remain active and engaged in the community, support their family and remain connected to others.**
- Caregivers are concerned about their loved ones' **access to healthcare and insurance as well as decreased independence and reliance on outsiders.**

Services and Supports

- **There is a lack of services and supports geared specifically toward Latino older adults in metro Denver.** While there are services specifically for Latinos and for older adults, there is a lack of defined services for Latino older adults. Latino older adults specifically need additional **health and home-related services, classes and activities to continue their education and remain engaged, a place to gather and transportation services.**
- **There is a lack of effective communication and outreach to Latino older adults about available services.** Whether services or supports are available through community-based organizations or government agencies, Latino older adults often do not know about the services or how to access them. Additionally, many services are complex and they need help navigating the complex systems.
- **Local organizations face funding constraints.** In the last 12 months, requests for services have increased for many organizations at the same time as funding has decreased.

Barriers to Accessing Services

- **Latino older adults face several barriers in accessing services,** such as inadequate information, financial resources, culturally responsive and age-appropriate services, language appropriate materials and staff, and transportation.
- **Local service providers need additional training and technical assistance** to learn how to better serve and reach Latino older adults. They also need help overcoming challenges such as inadequate funding or insufficient capacity.
- **Organizations need assistance in outreach and marketing to Latino older adults to engage them effectively.**

Policies That Limit and Facilitate Access to Services

- **Policies that help Latino older adults** prohibit discrimination, provide access to discounted services, facilitate access to government assistance, and protect from fraud or exploitation. Policies under the Older Americans Act help older adults access services, specifically the development of the Denver Area Agency on Aging and Boulder County Area Agency on Aging, which focus on helping older adults who are 60 and older age in place and independently.
- **Policies that hinder access** fail to adequately acknowledge the role of family in caregiving, make access complicated for intergenerational households and discriminate based on documentation.
- **Undocumented immigrants face additional barriers,** such as being prevented from accessing some services as well as experiencing fear, dependency and isolation.

Successful Strategies/Best Practices to Advocate for and Provide Services

- **Key strategies to successfully advocate for Latino older adults** include engaging them in politics, empowering and deploying them as community leaders driving change in their own communities, and working through networks or coalitions of organizations.
- **Key strategies to provide services to Latino older adults** focus on utilizing community-based approaches, which include providing culturally responsive and language appropriate services, training providers on the needs of Latino older adults, honoring the role of family, and accounting for physical capabilities and limitations.

- **Effective methods to engage Latino older adults** include honoring and acknowledging their assets and strengths and providing them with information in a way that speaks to them.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The assessment gathered feedback from key leaders, Latino older adults and service providers, and as a result revealed many common trends and themes among the Latino older adult population in metro Denver. Latino older adults are sharing in both the opportunities and challenges facing all of metro Denver's older adults in the first part of the 21st century. However, as revealed by the data, while they face additional challenges, they also possess cultural values and assets that can enrich the aging experience for Latinos as well as enhance the new narrative of aging that is currently being written by all older adults at this time in our nation's history. Now is the time to take action and capitalize on the assets that metro Denver's Latino older adults bring to our social fabric as well as to address the shared social challenges they face.

The following recommendations are derived from the analysis and synthesis of the information learned through the assessment, with the goal of helping Colorado Latino Age Wave move forward with its initiative. ***With all of the recommendations, it's important to engage Latino older adults in the process to rely on their assets and empower them for continued change.***

- **Support neighborhood-based and home-based programs.** There is a significant amount of skill and knowledge among the Latino older adult population to help support others as they age in place within their own communities. For example, there are “handymen and women” looking to support their neighbors as well as earn additional income who could be matched with older adults needing home repair. A next step could be mapping out the informal and formal assets and resources present in communities, building on existing informal relationships that already exist, and creating more formal program linkages.
- **Utilize the promotores model to train Latino older adults to help others navigate the system and increase access to services.** While the promotores model has traditionally been used in areas of health, the model can be used to train Latino older adults on how to guide other Latino older adults through complex systems, such as Medicaid, or locate other important services to help age in place. This presents a wealth of opportunities on many levels. First, it provides opportunities for Latino older adults to remain active and engaged in the community, a need expressed by many. Second, it builds on the existing assets of Latino older adults, such as skills, wisdom and community connections. Third, it helps reach Latino older adults with critical information, which many indicated is lacking, in a culturally appropriate and community-based approach. Through this approach, “promotores” can also be trained in the legal nuances of access for undocumented immigrants and help advise on eligibility requirements.
- **Build coalitions and partnerships among organizations serving the Latino community as well as older adults.** Engaging both types of organizations will present opportunities to rely on the strengths of each service area with the goal of building overall capacity. Service providers can work together to develop trainings, or share training opportunities. For example, if an older adult organization is training staff members on important issues in aging, it can invite Latino serving organizations to participate. Latino serving organizations can help older adult serving organizations better understand how to successfully outreach to and serve this population. This type of partnership and coalition building will also maximize resources in a time of decreased funding resources. It will also provide a venue for organizations with different strengths and expertise areas to advocate together for public policy change.

- **Support intergenerational programs that engage the entire family.** The importance of family was continually brought up when Latino older adults discussed aging in place. Whether acting as formal caregivers or simply providing ongoing support, family members play an important role. It is important to develop and support programs that train, empower and provide information to family members. This not only meets the needs of today's aging population, but it also empowers the next wave of Latino older adults and provides them with the information and resources as they age in place. It also builds on the strengths of the Latino populations in Denver by utilizing immediate resources in Latino older adults' lives.
- **Increase funding to Latino-serving agencies to increase their capacity to serve older adults and increase funding to aging service providers to increase their capacity serve Latinos more effectively.** Hispanics in Philanthropy and other philanthropic organizations have sought to increase funding for Latino-serving community-based organizations and nonprofits by increasing awareness among the philanthropic community about the role and value of these nonprofits. It is important to continue to invest in and empower Latino-serving community groups and nonprofits, particularly as they adapt to better serve older adults. Similarly, it is important to build the capacity of agencies serving older adults to equip them to better meet the needs of their Latino constituents.
- **Develop a public policy initiative that supports community-centered services.** There needs to be a public policy initiative that works with city and county agencies to make communities more walkable and accessible. For example, this includes issues such as sidewalks and traffic lights as well as land-use policies that allow for necessary commercial services and support services to be within walking distance in neighborhoods. In order to make neighborhoods and communities vibrant places for Latino older adults to age in place as well as young families to live and grow, individuals need to have close access to grocery stores with healthy foods and community gathering places.
- **Invest in training to develop champions among Latino older adults.** Latino older adults in metro Denver bring a wealth of knowledge and passion and indicated they are seeking ways to remain engaged in the community. By identifying existing leaders in communities throughout Denver and providing them with formal public policy and advocacy training, there can be an opportunity to utilize individuals' assets and strengths to create long-term change, whether it is on a statewide policy level, or for concrete policy and practice changes in their own communities (e.g., sidewalk widening).
- **Develop more effective communication strategies.** The assessment revealed a lack of effective communication and outreach strategies. Latino older adults and key leaders indicated that people do not know about services or how to access them. Similarly, provider survey respondents also indicated they need support in reaching the Latino older adult community. A program should be initiated that would identify and map natural networks to understand community communication; understand literacy and language needs at the community level; and determine culturally relevant methods for distributing information. For example, information could be distributed using *telenovelas*, *radionovelas* and *fotonovelas*, small booklets/pamphlets that use symbols and illustrations to educate and inform. Similarly, an additional strategy could include creating a clearinghouse to support organizations to develop culturally and language appropriate materials and services. It would be beneficial to have an accessible resource that has appropriate translations geared toward local communities that take into account language and cultural factors.