Differences in Mental Health Care Needs Among Latinx Ethnic Groups in California

The Latinx population — the largest racial and ethnic group in California — is diverse, with unique experiences, cultural backgrounds, and demographic profiles, yet is often treated as a single homogeneous population. A new UCLA Center for Health Policy Research study examines mental health distress, perceived need, and unmet need, focusing on the variations among Latinx ethnic groups in California.

Mental health needs are measured in two different ways:

- **Perceived need** asks adults whether they felt they needed help with mental, emotional, alcohol, or drug problems.
- **Serious psychological distress (SPD) or moderate psychological distress (MPD)** is based on reporting symptoms related to depression and anxiety.

All Latinx and some ethnic groups were more likely to report SPD/MPD, which shows a need for mental health care, than they were to think that they needed mental health care. That could indicate a mental health literacy gap.

### Perceived Need vs. SPD or MPD Among Latinx Adults

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Perceived Need</th>
<th>SPD/MPD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Latinx</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Central American*</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Unmet Mental Health Needs Among Latinx Adults with Perceived Need vs. SPD or MPD

- **Nearly 5 out of 10** of all Latinx adults who felt they needed mental health services experienced unmet need for mental health care, however, **6 out of 10** Latinx adults with SPD or MPD experienced unmet need for mental health care.

### Policy Recommendations

- Promote mental health literacy.
- Increase access to culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health services.
- Support policies on collecting and reporting disaggregated data.

Read the policy brief: [https://ucla.in/2UxPSnX](https://ucla.in/2UxPSnX)

*Other Central American includes Panamanian, Costa Rican, Nicaraguan, Honduran, Guatemalan, and Belizean

Source: 2015–2019 California Health Interview Survey (CHIS)