

## Hispanic Outreach: *Proyecto Vida: Latino Deje de Fumar*

By Roena Rabelo Vega

In July 2005, the Tobacco Dependence Program was awarded funding by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (New Jersey Health Initiatives), for the purpose of developing a culturally competent tobacco cessation outreach service for Latino smokers in New Jersey.

**Facts** Smoking and other forms of tobacco use cause serious social, economic, and health problems in every community without discrimination to age, ethnicity, or gender. Smoking is the single biggest cause of premature death and disease in the United States with 440,000 premature deaths and 8.6 million cases of tobacco-caused illnesses per year. It is responsible for 87% of all lung cancer deaths in the United States and is the leading cause of cancer deaths among Hispanics. It kills over 10,000 New Jersey residents per year and over 200,000 additional residents will suffer smoking caused diseases.

**Tobacco Use Among Latinos** A recent study in New Jersey found cigarette use to be high among Hispanic men at 23.1% and growing quickly among Hispanic origin youth. In middle school students, 35.6% of Hispanics have tried smoking cigarettes compared to 31.1% non-Hispanic blacks, and 18.1% non-Hispanic white students. This upward trend affecting the Hispanic community is due in part to social, cultural and economic factors; for example, as Hispanic adolescents begin the acculturation process, their behavior begins to resemble that of non-Hispanic whites. One explanation may be that adolescents who are more acculturated are more likely to spend time with friends who smoke, which creates a social norm tolerant of smoking and also increases their access to cigarettes. Also, multi-ethnic adolescents (those who identify with two or more ethnic groups) appear to be at higher risk of smoking initiation as well.

**Tobacco Marketing Campaigns** In August 2005, Time Magazine reported Latino consumer spending had reached \$800 billion, a figure that tobacco companies have known for some time and have coined “Latinos” as the hottest emerging market for their product. The level of Latino consumer spending coupled with the age factor—that one third of US-based Latinos are under 18 years of age, make them a strategic focus for tobacco marketing. These marketing strategies are causing an increase in Latino smokers while the number of non-Hispanic smokers declines.

**Under-utilization of Smoking Cessation Services** New Jersey residents have three options for smoking cessation services that follow Public Health Service Guidelines. NJ Quitcenters are specialist centers that provide face-to-face tobacco dependence treatment at low or no cost. These centers are located in New Brunswick, Newark, Camden, Somerset, and Trenton. NJ Quitline is a toll-free telephone counseling service for tobacco users and NJ Quitnet is a free Internet site providing information designed to help smokers quit, chat rooms, and “ask the expert” services. While approximately 10% of New Jersey smokers are Latino, only 3% of those using quit smoking services are Latino.

**Proyecto Vida: Latino Deje de Fumar** is a program that aims to increase utilization of smoking cessation services by Latino smokers in New Jersey by providing language and culturally appropriate tobacco cessation services. Part of the overall strategy for increasing use of services is by marketing the program to the Latino community via community outreach, print media, neighborhood canvassing, and using Latino client based grass roots organizations as conduits for information dissemination. Informing the community is only part of the equation; providing culture and language appropriate services is the critical component to increasing Latino utilization of tobacco cessation services. Ultimately, the goal is to change the upward trend of Latino smokers through information, education, and clinical services.



A variety of cultural factors must also be addressed as the Hispanic community encompasses a varied population with cultural, economic, and even political peculiarities. While Spanish is the language Latinos have in common, other factors must be considered when conducting outreach and then providing tobacco cessation services to Latinos. The most recent influx of Latino immigrants to New Jersey is from southern Mexico and Guatemala. Quite often, these Latinos are undocumented immigrants without the protections afforded to legal immigrants, including access to health care. Further, the fear of deportation makes these immigrants less likely to seek social services in buildings that appear too daunting. Developing a solid community message and reputation to allay fears of legal repercussions for seeking services is key to reaching out to this community.

While some Latinos from Columbia or Santo Domingo have legal immigration status, many remain without health insurance or are underinsured. Latinos from Puerto Rico or Cuba are most likely to have some form of insurance, and speak English, yet, may feel more comfortable speaking in Spanish.

This project embraces the fact that social, political and cultural differences exist between Latinos from different countries; however, by partnering with a variety of grassroots organizations we have been able to provide information, education, and treatment for anyone in the Hispanic community who wishes to stop smoking. An important component to this project will be to train other smoking cessation organizations to provide culturally sensitive services throughout New Jersey for their Latino community.

The Tobacco Dependence Clinic is known for providing state of the art smoking cessation services to all clientele; we strengthen our mission by extending those same services to the Latino community in the culture and language of their preference.

**Current State of Affairs** From September 2005, to March 27, 2006 the number of Latino clients who have come to the Tobacco Dependence Program for services has increased from 3% to a peak of 20% since the inception of the project in July 2005.