



COMMUNITY SPECIFIC INSIGHTS:

Florida

THE POWER OF FEAR & TRUST:

Mobilizing a Movement to Educate, Reassure, and Enroll Eligible Latinx Immigrant Communities in Public Health Benefits

Florida

Florida has not expanded Medicaid eligibility. In addition, all lawfully present immigrants, including pregnant people, are subject to a five-year waiting period (known as the five-year bar) before they can access Medicaid (children in the five-year waiting period are covered in Florida).

The following insights and recommendations are informed by four stakeholder discussions in Florida, as well as a cohort of national organizations that have a focus on the state.

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COLLABORATION

- The structure and collaborative nature of the networks that have been put in place to get enrollment information out into the world, but the networks have yet to be fully mobilized at the intersection of immigration and health, especially when it comes to mitigating fear of public charge.
- Some advocates believe that the “pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps” mentality, which is more prevalent among elder Cuban populations, is best countered through community-based organizations and first-generation activists, who tend to be more open-minded, though under-resourced, for door-to-door outreach and advocacy.

COMMUNICATION

- The Latinx immigrant population in Florida is complex, more so than other regions, given its proximity to Central America and an aging, yet powerful, population of Cubans. Navigating these complex dynamics, especially long-standing trauma for many around socialism and communism, requires thoughtful dialogue about the American health care system and the benefits of public benefits and preventive health services with the community as a whole.
- Lawfully present immigrants help fuel billions of dollars into the state’s economy through agriculture and tourism, but are often not eligible for employer-sponsored coverage given part-time or seasonal work classifications. There may be an opportunity to engage with them at their places of work or at public transportation centers.

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MESSENGERS

- To build unity and find middle ground with policymakers and some subsets of immigrant communities (e.g., elder Cubans), messengers must meet people where they are to “show, not tell” the myriad ways immigrants are contributing to the community (and the state’s economy) yet lack access to benefits.
- State policymakers continue to lack clear and concise information on intersecting health and immigration related issues. Continued engagement, with easy to use language and data, can help mobilize them as spokespeople, paired with a core set of messages that all groups can amplify.

The Florida Department of Health now has a Minority Health subset, and every county in the state has a liaison that is tasked with advancing its priorities. There remains an opportunity, though lack of capacity, to engage and deepen relationships with these agencies and representatives.

- Individuals, including Rep. Kathy Castor (Tampa), as well as the Mayor’s Hispanic Services Council, the Office of New Americans of Miami-Dade, and the Mexican consulate, have good working relationships with advocates and are trusted messengers.

PARTNERS

- Navigators are trusted sources, but often lack factual information about current immigration policy. They have had the most success in countering misinformation and fear when armed with printed materials from high-ranking officials and agencies such as USCIS.
- Transportation continues to be a big barrier for the Latinx population, so groups are building upon COVID learnings to continue outreach via mobile clinics and other community-based visits to engage systemically excluded communities through partnerships with the Redlands Christian Migrant Association around the state.

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TACTICS

- Advocates expressed a marketing-deficit and that there is an opportunity to build upon successful enrollment activations via Spanish-language radio and PSAs, but with a specific focus on benefits available to Latinx immigrants and mixed-status households.
- WhatsApp is a highly relied upon medium for sharing information with immigrant communities and advocates on-the-ground are eager for platform specific content they can deploy across this channel.
- There is also a large population of Latinx celebrities and TV personalities that should be engaged in public education campaigns, especially those that can combat the spread of mis/disinformation.

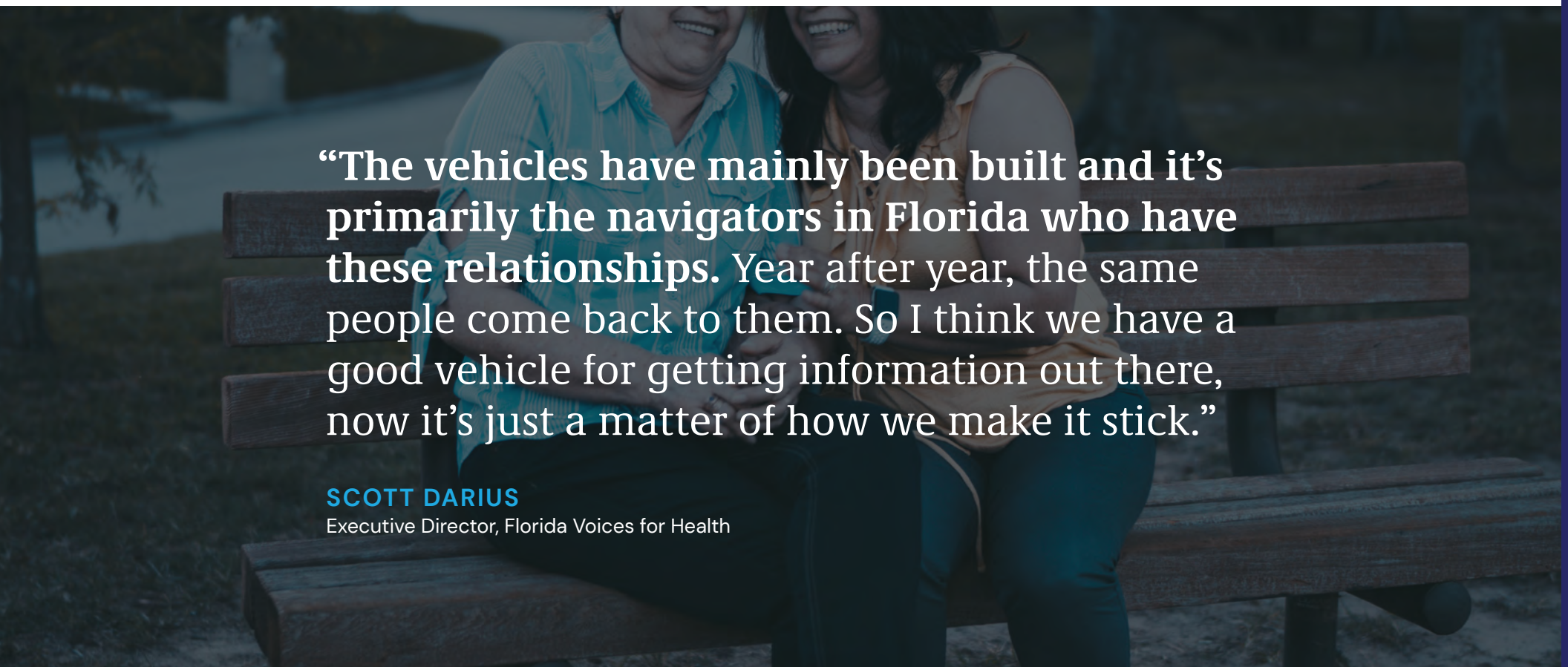
POLICY

- The primary policy push among health care advocates remains focused on expanding Medicaid in Florida. In addition, they are pushing for a more coordinated enrollment application system, which can provide presumed eligibility across a variety of public assistance programs and benefits following the application for one.
- Advocates on-the-ground are working hard to tackle the upcoming end of PHE as an opportunity to get information and resources on-the-ground, before public trust is lost. However, they worry administrative action and guidance will only happen at the last moment, potentially once individuals have already lost coverage.
- Florida still doesn't allow lawfully residing pregnant people to have access to Medicaid for five years, which local advocates on-the-ground are trying to address, especially as it has an outsized impact on immigrant communities. States have the option under CHIPRA to waive the five-year waiting period and expand Medicaid to allow lawfully present pregnant people and children access to Medicaid.

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POLICY, CONT'D


- Advocates are also pushing to expand the eligibility for immigrant children to have access to affordable coverage under Kid-Care.
- Within the last several years, a bill was passed in Florida that allowed for Medicaid reimbursement of health services provided in schools. So, schools are now able to have health care clinics built into the campus itself. The Health School Model piloted in a few schools could provide an opportunity for information sharing from community advocates out into the community.



“The vehicles have mainly been built and it’s primarily the navigators in Florida who have these relationships. Year after year, the same people come back to them. So I think we have a good vehicle for getting information out there, now it’s just a matter of how we make it stick.”

SCOTT DARIUS

Executive Director, Florida Voices for Health



“We don’t look at that population as a homogenous population. Because I look at Florida and it’s a pretty diverse state. And our Latino community is very diverse from one end of the state to the other. It’s if you try to do a one size fits all approach, that’s where that first failure is. And it does not help when you’re trying to build trust.”

JODI RAY

Director, University of Southern Florida (USF)

FLORIDA-SPECIFIC STAKEHOLDERS

⁵ “Expanded Stakeholders” is not a comprehensive list but instead reflective of the organizations that were identified throughout exploratory discussions with national and state stakeholders. They sit somewhere at the intersection of race equity and health justice, with a specific focus on Latinx immigrant communities. These organizations and groups have not been engaged in the development or provided insights for this report.

