

Understanding, going through, and managing loss, grief, and bereavement: Life with the Covid-19 pandemic for Latinos with a view on Latino Men *Session 3*

Presented by Elizabeth Robles, LPC, CT, EOLD
August 1st, 2022.

Presented in 2022 by the National Hispanic and Latino Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC), and the Hispanic and Latino Prevention Technology Transfer Center (PTTC), National Latino Behavioral Health Association (NLBHA) P.O. Box 1360, Pena Blanca, NM 87041.

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At the time of this publication, Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon, Ph.D, served as Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and the Administrator of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

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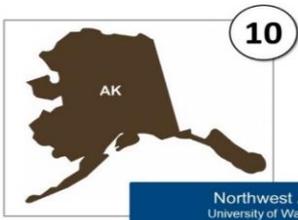
The use of affirming language inspires hope.

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Words have power.

PEOPLE FIRST.

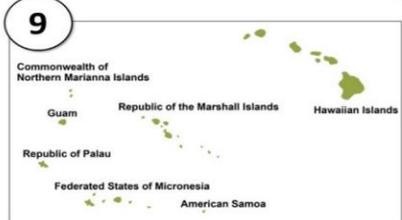
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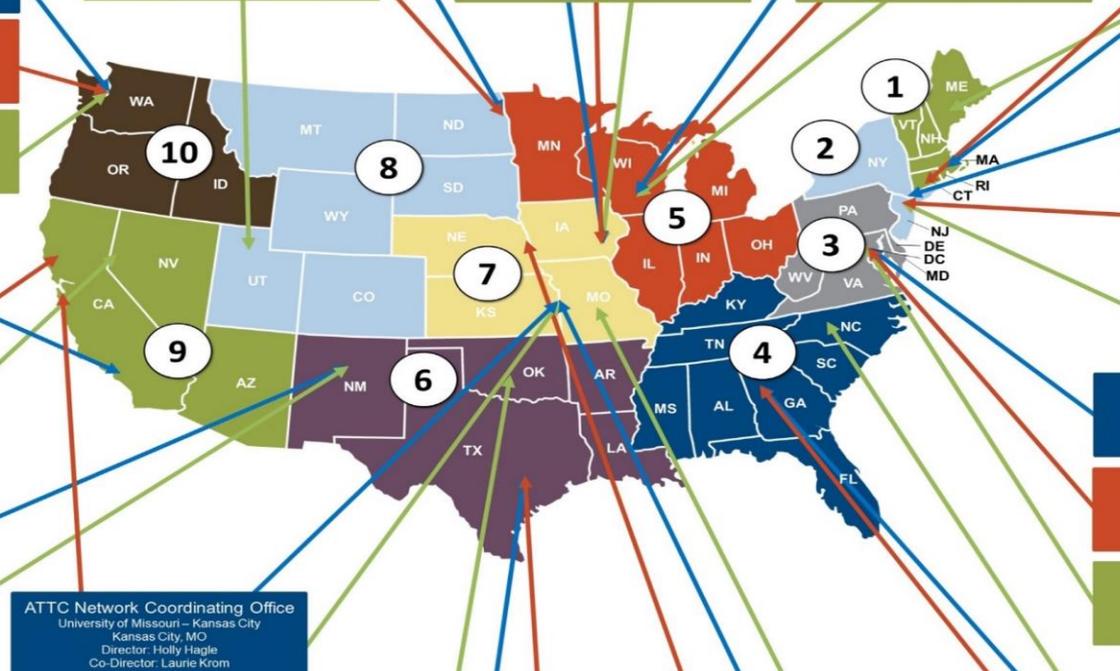


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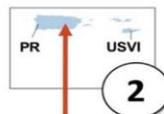


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The Mission and Goal of The National Latino Behavioral Health Association is to influence national behavioral health policy, eliminate disparities in funding and access to services, and improve the quality of services and treatment outcomes for Latino populations.

NLBHA's Objectives

NLBHA's Objective is to provide national leadership on mental health and substance abuse concerns of the Latino community. NLBHA's Policy Priorities are:

1. Targeted Capacity Expansion of Mental Health Services for Latinos
2. Latino Behavioral Health Evidenced Based Practices
3. Legislation to increase the number of Counselors/Therapists/Other Behavioral Health Practitioners
4. Funding for Co-Occurring Disorders of Alcohol and Substance Abuse
5. Opioid Crisis in the Latino Community
6. Suicide Prevention



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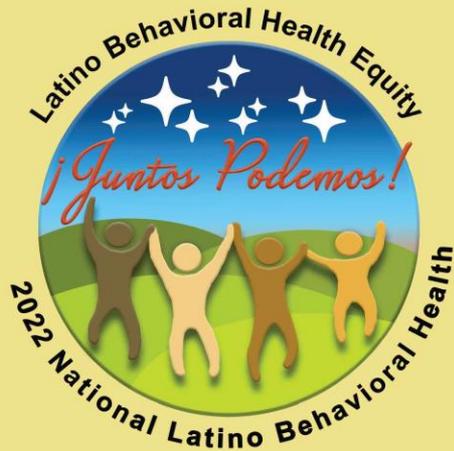


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Today's presenter

Elizabeth Robles works in the El Paso region as a behavioral health care professional specializing in life changes, trauma, grief, and loss. Elizabeth is Certified in Thanatology: Death, Dying & Bereavement through the Association of Death Education Counseling (ADEC). Elizabeth brings to her practice a profound understanding of death coupled with a grounding in neuroscience. Her treatment approach offers patients the hope and strategies to facilitate continuous emotional renewal in the face of life's constant changes. She is also founder of the Facebook group, *Aqui Con Death*, as a bicultural space where people can learn and share their unique perspectives about *la muerte*, *duelo y luto*. In addition to her private practice, Elizabeth serves as Clinical Director for the MYC Institute of Integrative Health, an El Paso nonprofit organization which advocates for body/mind/spirit approaches to wellbeing. In 2020, Elizabeth became a Certified End of Life Doula.



Elizabeth Robles,
LPC, CT, EOLD

Understanding, going through, and managing loss, grief, and bereavement: Life with the Covid-19 pandemic for Latinos with a view on Latino Men *Session 3*

Presented by Elizabeth Robles, LPC, CT, EOLD
August 1st, 2022.

Recap from Session II

- ❑ **Covid -19 has heavily impacted the standard of living and the quality of life of Latinos in the US.**
- ❑ **Covid-19 is responsible for most hospitalizations and deaths amongst Latinos as the largest population group affected with staggering numbers by this virus.**
- ❑ **Due to the stringent protocols needed to reduce the incidence of contamination of Covid 19, Latinos had minimal to no opportunity to be with their loved ones during hospitalizations or be present during the time of death.**
- ❑ **The inability to say goodbye has been reported to have had an impact in the behavioral health of many and brings about the experiencing of other symptoms related to other disorders.**
- ❑ **Studies indicate that many Latinos continue to struggle with the aftermath of the lack of “closure” in their grief and bereavement process and that many people experience feelings of isolation, traumatic grief, ambiguous loss, disenfranchised grief, cumulative grief as well as symptoms of prolonged grief or complicated grief.**

The Importance of Rituals and Ceremony

Rituals and ceremony help us heal and move in our bereavement and grief journey.

The absence of these events augments risk factors for Latinos as a result of the importance these norms have on the individual.

There is a deep cultural relatedness, reference and adherence to cultural beliefs about death, rituals, religion, and Latino values (i.e., *familismo*, *respeto*, *simpatía*, *personalismo*) that vary by gender and acculturation. Garcini, et all, 2021



Risk Factors Due to Grief and Loss

Risk factors associated with lowered well-being and health amongst Latinos include being a male, financial strain, cultural stressors, having an undocumented legal status, experiencing loss of a loved one at a younger age, and having poor physical health.

Garcini, et all, 2021

Severe psychological stress experienced by the bereaved can have significant health consequences and can be associated with diminished health wellness including increased risk of mortality and illness, higher cardiovascular risk, disability, low functioning, and symptoms of psychological distress (depression, anxiety and anger).

Stahl & Shultz,



More so, bereavement may be characterized by poor or harmful health behaviors that are associated with compromised well-being such as altered sleep patterns, increased alcohol and drug consumption, and poor nutrition due to diminished appetite and involuntary weight loss.

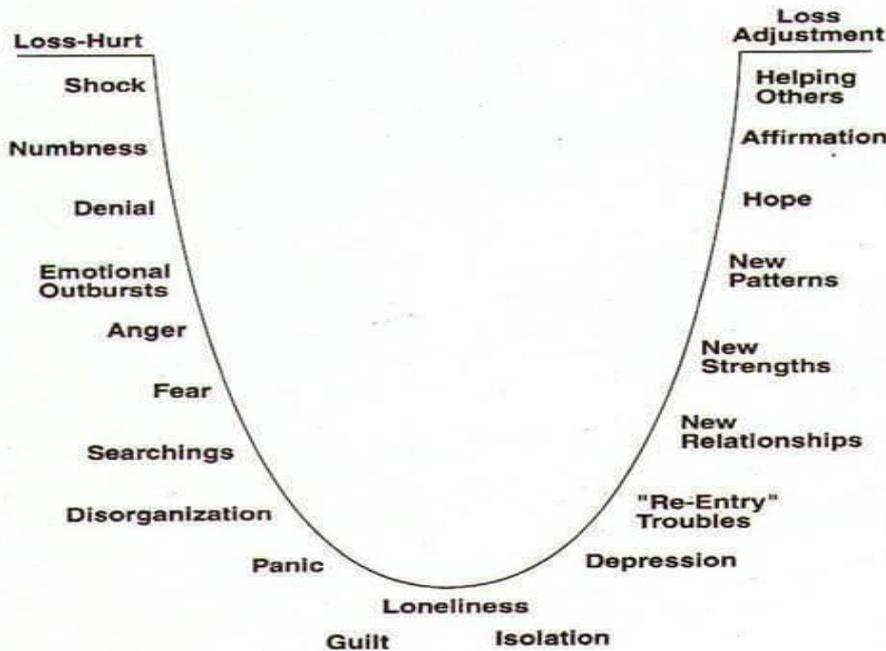
Unfortunately, despite widespread evidence documenting the effect of bereavement across various health outcomes and health behaviors, information about the bereavement process and related vulnerabilities among Latinos is limited.

McLeod, et all, 2016

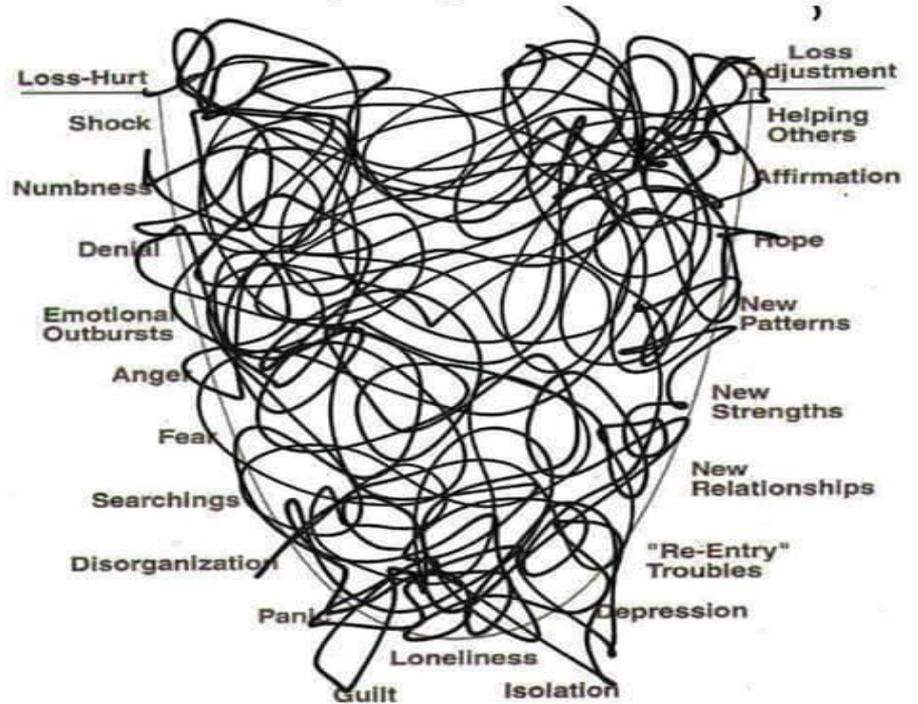
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Moving Forward in Grief and Bereavement, But It's Hardly a Straight Line...

STAGES OF GRIEF



My experience



We All Have the Right To Grieve

We all need to know that we can grieve, work with our losses and choose to bereave.

While we have established systems that may be strengthened by our world views, cultural lens, personal identification of ourselves, others around us and our specific lifestyles, we often fear the process of mourning and attribute any attention we give it to weakness, fallacy or lack of being able to handle such a jarring experience.

We All Have the Right To Grieve and Bereave

To experience your own unique grief

To talk about your grief

To feel a multitude of emotions

To be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits

To experience “Grief bursts”/Grief attacks

To make use of ritual

To embrace your spirituality

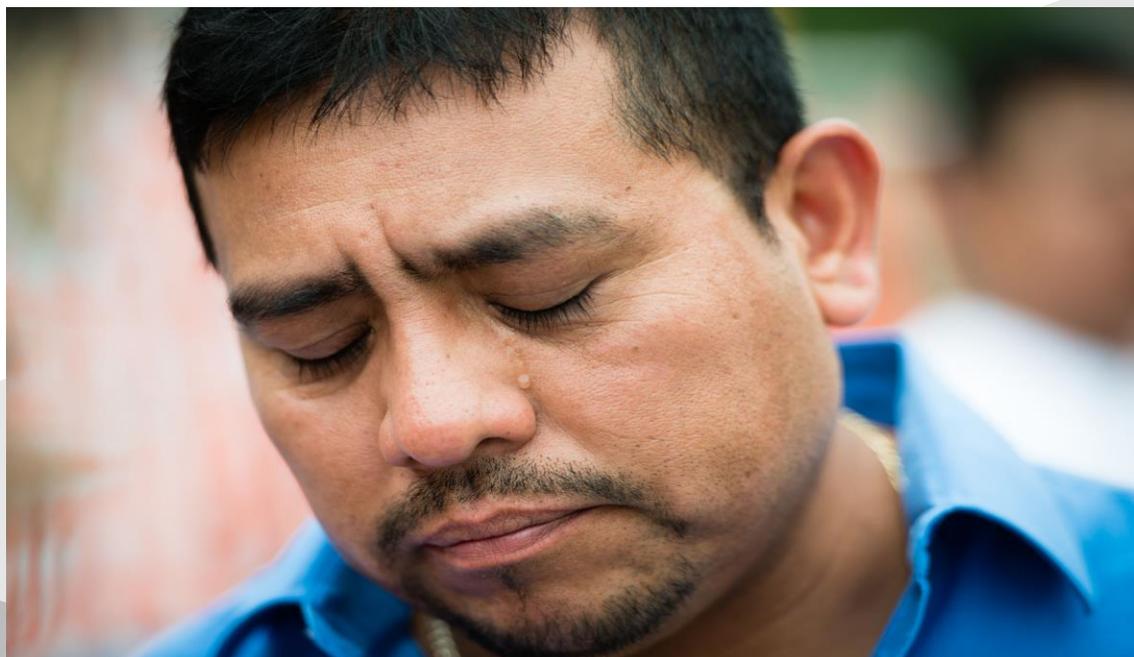
To search for meaning

To treasure your memories

To move toward your grief and heal

Alan Wolfelt, 2013

Latino Men and Loss, Grief and Bereavement due to Covid-19 Losses



Latino Men Loss, Grief and Bereavement due to Covid-19

Latino men too are suffering tremendous loss proportionate to the raging numbers of death due to the pandemic.

Historically and culturally, Latino men's grief is commonly overlooked during the initial death of a loved one as well as in the progression of loss and bereavement.

Much of the focus from family members and community is given to the maternal figures (mother, grandmothers), spouses (wives) and children, (especially young children).

Latino Men and Loss, Grief and Bereavement due to Covid-19

While the interactions of giving condolences and paying the proper respects to the patriarchal head of the family are common and expected as part of offering condolences, there are targeted points that impact the grief process for men which reinforce the societal expectation of not being vulnerable in the face of deep emotional pain and loss.

- **The familismo, simpatismo and compadrazgo displayed by the mourners that ties them to the family of the deceased.**
- **The established rules of conduct for men and between men. For example, strong handshakes, powerful embraces with hearty backslaps are common body and physical language behaviors.**

These societal unspoken rules of conduct plague men with rigid gender expectations.

- **The traditional notion of not crying**
- **The dynamic of fatalismo in knowing that we will all die one day, (asi es la vida, such is life)**
- **The notion that that this death had to be (very likely as God's will)**
- **The disenfranchisement of not being able to truly express grief and bereavement as a risk of appearing weak and unable to control the situation at hand**

These factors and others, historically prove to be a potential pathway to men experiencing maladaptive symptomology.

Grieving Alone/Grieving Together for Men

Evidence tells us that men are more likely than women to remain silent or grieve in isolation, engage in action-oriented forms of grief expression, or lose themselves in distractions such as work or throwing themselves into a new relationship.

Research suggests that men appear to be more susceptible to developing a reliance on alcohol or engaging in risk-taking behaviors following a loss and are more likely than women to commit suicide following the death of a spouse.

Some studies suggest that men are more likely to use the strategies of avoidance, intellectualization, and minimization when grieving and, although research is inconsistent on the point, they may have a greater tendency to somaticize emotional and psychological pain.

Black, 1991; Canetto, et all, 2012; Doka et all, 2010; Sanders,1980, 1998;
Staudacher, 1991;Stillion, 1985



The Importance of the Man Cave

As a society we have the responsibility to give our new generations of men the message that there is no need for rigid messaging, “ to be strong, don’t cry, suck it up, and don’t make others feel uncomfortable.”

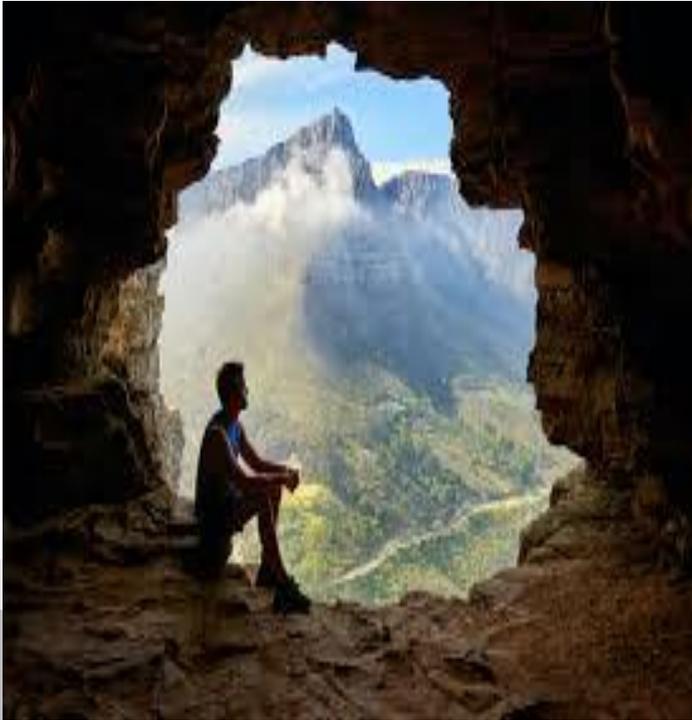
Cultural expectations about what constitutes healthy grieving hold that to heal, one has to speak about, process, and "work through" one's thoughts and feelings by sharing them.

Those who grieve silently rather than talking about their feelings may be labeled as excessively withdrawn, clinically depressed, or incommunicative.

Men who prize stoicism as an expression of independence or dignity, or as a way of not putting their burdens on others may be in denial or out of touch.

Men who engage in action-oriented expressions of grief, such as physical activity or private rituals away from the eyes of others, or who attempt to cope through distraction, positive thinking, planning, or intellectualization may be accused of running away from their grief.

There is nothing wrong or unhealthy about any of them. In fact, these tendencies may simply be a part of a style of grieving referred to as "the masculine side of healing."



Suffering Alone vs Understanding a Man's Style

- Let them talk. Give a grieving man the opportunity to talk about his or their loss.**
- Take cues from their behavior and step in when they give you an in.**
- Offer some company when they want it, on their time.**
- Ask them how they feel, avoid asking how they are doing.**
- Find your safe place that is comfortable for them.**
- Respect their need for silence .**
- Loss doesn't need to end in divorce.**
- Incorporate conversations of how important they are to the family.**
- There are no superheroes in loss, grief and bereavement.**
- There is always a balance in all our emotions, cognitions, beliefs and overall personhood.**

Latino Men Can be Wonderful Leaders Within Their Relationship Networks

Familismo incorporates honor, support, interconnectedness, and valuing of family above self. As noted earlier, the initial phases of grief and loss often contribute to Latino men feeling profoundly isolated.

Based on years of experience as a bicultural LPC and thanatologist, I offer the following framework as a resource for Latinos experiencing loss so that isolation can be managed, and grief channeled into healing others.

- 1. Awareness. Guide men to understand their own primary modes of grieving, i.e., physical, spiritual, cognitive, and emotional**
- 2. Awareness of Others. Encourage men to assess as best as they can the modes of grief as expressed by their spouses, children and/or other family members, colleagues or friends who share loss.**
- 3. Suggest to men that they become aware of their own bereavement behavior and communicate to others how and what works for them (crying in the shower, at night before sleep, on the walk to school, driving, etc.). Bereavement can be a learned behavior.**
- 4. Establish a peer support network. Reach out to other Latinos in the network (even one person is a start) with the goal of being there for each other whenever deep grief symptoms and the painful abyss arises. Establish holding deep confidentiality for whatever is expressed.**
- 5. Identify Latino mentors and learn from their experiences of loss.**

Latino Men Can be Wonderful Leaders Within Their Relationship Networks

6. Learn about potential challenges that will accompany the grief journey (compromised health, anxiety, depression, anger, maladaptive choices) and share with spouses, children, friends, professionals when possible.
7. Encourage men to be alert as often as possible, of their own and to their “family’s” behaviors; when optimal, ask prompting questions to help everyone express themselves in ways that don’t create feelings of awkward emotional intrusion, i.e., where children or adults may express themselves naturally.
8. Encourage the men to connect with family on a daily and weekly basis about how everyone including themselves is doing. Check in with peers, mentors or professionals as needed.
9. Normalize the process of adapting to the changes this loss brings in by using internal and external resources.
10. **Familismo** can be the safety net that weaves layers of support for and amongst each member of the family; men can be active leaders and strong members of the group to create a synergy of healing, support and recovery for themselves and for others.



It's not a process, it's a journey



Yo puedo, nosotros podemos (I can, we can)

Pillars that help Latino men thrive in their role to lead in the Grief Journey

- Recognize that we will all grieve and choose to bereave differently regardless of gender or ethnic background.**
- Use balance in learning a behavior and offering compassion, empathy, understanding, (try putting yourself in their shoes), respect and love.**
- Loss is not a process that begins and ends, it is a journey with ups, downs, clear sunny skies, rain, fog and snow. It appears daunting but the sun does at some point come out and we find comfort and solace in the joy of having had that person in our lives.**
- The good thing about loss is that it has the capacity to makes us more aware, more humane, more appreciative of what we had and more grateful of what we can have today.**
- Making meaning of that loss means understanding that death is a natural part of life. We will all die some day and life is meant to be lived, enjoyed and experienced.**
- The persons who have died leave us a wealth of experiences, wisdom, understandings and we are able to honor and celebrate their existence and their role in our life by nurturing their memory in our mind, our love and our purpose.**



Q & A



Rabindranath Tagore

Death is not extinguishing the light;
it is only putting out the lamp
because the dawn has come



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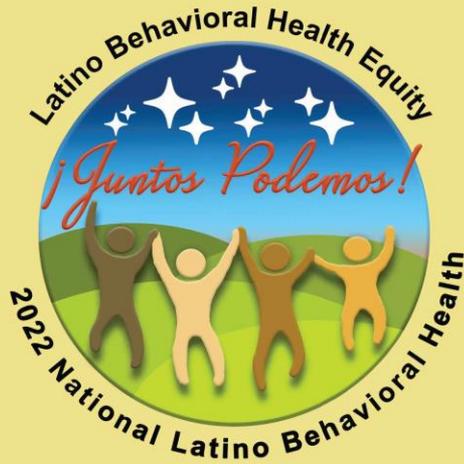


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