

## LATINO SERVICE PROVIDERS FOCUS GROUP

### INTRODUCTION

On Thursday, August 24, 2006 Arrow Consultants conducted a focus group of service providers in East Hampton and Southampton who work with Latino residents of the South Fork. As in the first assessment conducted in 2001, it was decided that conducting a focus group made up of Latino Service providers would offer an important perspective into the delivery of healthcare services to this ever-growing segment of the population of East Hampton Township.

The invitation list for this group included representatives from East Hampton Township, Suffolk County Department of Health, medical providers, faith-based, not-for-profit and community-outreach organizations on the South Fork in an effort to obtain as broad-based, and diverse a provider group as possible. The focus group was hosted at the office of the East Hampton Healthcare Foundation.

Four service providers participated in the two-hour group representing East Hampton Township, Southampton Hospital, and the not-for-profit service organization, South Fork Community Health Initiative (SFCHI). Representatives from the Office of the Hispanic Apostolate and the Organisation Latino Americano (OLA) were scheduled to participate, but cancelled due to last minute scheduling conflicts. Their input was sought in phone interviews following the focus group.

### PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION

The discussion format for the two-hour focus group was driven by the “priority issues” raised by the Latino Providers group in 2001. To supplement the discussion, the 2006 focus group participants were also asked to list what they believe are currently the three most pressing healthcare problems facing the Latino community of the South Fork. The responses were then ranked and scored to generate themes for discussion.

The top three priority issues raised in the 2001 Latino Providers Focus group discussed by the 2006 group were:

1. Access to health information/ ability to communicate in Spanish
2. Access to Mental Health/Substance Abuse counseling
3. High cost of health insurance/healthcare

The focus group facilitators guided the participants through the discussion of each issue by asking them to identify whether:

1. The issue had changed (improved, declined, or remained the same)
2. Factors contributing to that change
3. Suggestions for improving the issue in the future

**PRIORITY ISSUE #1: ACCESS TO INFORMATION/ COMMUNICATION IN SPANISH**

All of the participants of the current Latino Service-Providers focus group agreed that the main factor preventing the Latino community from accessing healthcare continued to be the lack of health information available in Spanish, including insurance forms, bills, and instructions about illnesses or medications prescribed.

While half of the group participants felt the situation had remained the same, the other half believed that access to Spanish-language translation and interpretation had actually declined or worsened since the previous assessment. Listed below is a summary of their comments:

Improved	Remained the Same	Declined
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 years ago there were no translation services available at Southampton Hospital, now there is one full-time employee providing translation during business hours.</li> <li>• There is greater availability of English-language classes for residents of the South Fork.</li> <li>• There is greater awareness among the general population of the <u>need</u> for Spanish-language translation, particularly in medical settings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More information is available in Spanish, but barriers continue related to country of origin (dialect) and accuracy of translation.</li> <li>• “Phone-line” translation services exist, but are of limited use in medical situations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despite expansion of services, the growth in the Latino population has far out paced currently available translation services.</li> <li>• While Spanish-translation of many medical forms is available, the quality of that translation is inconsistent to poor.</li> <li>• Medical and support staff at Southampton hospital and at SCDOH satellite clinic in East Hampton have virtually no Spanish-speaking ability.</li> <li>• Though available in many different locations (i.e. libraries, faith-based organizations, Eastern Suffolk BOCES) a comprehensive directory of literacy class providers does not exist.</li> </ul>

Improved	Remained the Same	Declined
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual efforts at creating Spanish-language “tutorials” specific to the needs of healthcare providers is being offered by the Director of Translation Services at Southampton Hospital.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There is a growing resentment and occasional violence directed toward the Latino community on the part of some residents of the South Fork .</li> <li>There exists no regular meeting or networking opportunity for South Fork Latino Service Providers to meet and share program information, trends within the community, or work collaboratively to ensure a comprehensive network of services.</li> </ul>

**PRIORITY ISSUE #2 - ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH/ SUBSTANCE ABUSE ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT**

As with the general population, there continues to be extremely limited availability of mental health counseling for Spanish-speaking residents of the East End; especially in the areas of adolescent and alcohol/substance abuse. While focus group participants emphasized the fact that lack of mental health counseling was a critical issue for the general community (and had actually worsened in their opinion since the 2001 assessment), they emphasized their particular concern for the Latino community, as there continues to be both a lack of qualified professionals, available appointment hours and cultural issues within the Latino community that prevent their access to needed services.

As was noted above, the focus group participants universally felt that the lack of access to mental health services had worsened since the previous assessment. Listed in the table below is a summary of their comments:

Improved	Remained the Same	Declined
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The primary reason for the decline in services is the growth of Latino population on the South Fork since previous assessment. It has far out-paced any available Spanish language services offered in the area.</li> <li>Multi-generational Latino families often include</li> </ul>

Improved	Remained the Same	Declined
		<p>family/household members that are sometimes absent for long periods of time creating particular stress on families that are continually in transition.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The nature of mental health/substance abuse treatment often requires a long-term time/financial commitment that is difficult to both afford and sustain over time.</li> </ul>

**PRIORITY ISSUE #3 – HIGH COST OF HEALTHCARE / HEALTH INSURANCE**

Latino Providers focus group participants emphasized the fact that although the high cost of healthcare affects the general population (both locally and nationally), it particularly impacts the Latino community as these residents often work in jobs that do not offer health insurance. While recent studies highlight the fact that uninsured Latinos often pay “out-of-pocket” for necessary or urgent healthcare, focus group participants noted that regular prevention, screening programs, or check-ups are rarely sought due to cost and time constraints.

Improved	Remained the Same	Declined
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Access to healthcare “grants” from EHHF (administered through SFCHI) have enabled uninsured residents of limited means to pay for care at the EHHC.</li> <li>Translation and benefits counseling offered by SFCHI have empowered Latino residents to access available health insurance plans.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Latinos are disproportionately represented in employment areas that do not offer health insurance.</li> <li>Care for illness is sought when it is chronic or acute and more difficult/expensive to treat.</li> <li>High cost of specialty and sub-specialty care.</li> <li>Decrease in providers who take limited insurance assignment.</li> <li>Few to no opportunities to negotiate a sliding scale payment structure.</li> <li>Little help with rising cost of prescription medication</li> </ul>

Improved	Remained the Same	Declined
		and/or prescription plans. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insurance plans rarely cover home care.</li> <li>• Orthopedic care is virtually unaffordable and unavailable.</li> </ul>

### **Recommendations for East Hampton Healthcare Foundation**

Finally, the focus group facilitators briefly reviewed the mission and goals of the East Hampton Healthcare Foundation, and they queried the participants as to their recommendations for, expansion and/or improvement of services for the Latino Community. Their recommendations were:

- **Enhance communication between and among Latino Service providers by working through existing relationship with South Fork Community Health Initiative and sponsoring semi-annual facilitated meetings.** The goal of the meetings would be to celebrate successes, share information, network regarding up-coming programs and collaborate on mutually beneficial projects.
  - Assist in the creation and maintenance a listserv where providers can access the most current information regarding programs and services in the area;
  - Work through collaborative to create a public awareness campaign to educate the general community regarding the Latino population;
  - Provide technical assistance to the SFCHI in the creation and maintenance of a comprehensive list of language classes (both English and Spanish) that could be posted in PDF form on SFCHI and/or EHHF website.
  - Expand efforts to attract culturally diverse healthcare providers to the area.
  
- **Provide supportive funding for translation services at Southampton Hospital or other community-based organizations.**
  - Provide grant to fund community-specific directory of healthcare providers and organizations that have Spanish-speaking staff and/or translation services that could be updated annually.
  - Assist in grant-writing activities using data from previous and current assessments to support and expand current collaborative relationships with SFCHI, Southampton Hospital and East Hampton Township.

- **Schedule community outreach initiatives related to healthcare prevention and screening services (such as the regular check-ups, diabetes/cancer screenings etc...) during winter months (December – February).**