

## New poll shows N.M. Latino families continue to face extreme economic hardship

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Sun Correspondent  
Friday, 04 February 2022 06:09

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### The need to ensure an inclusive recovery

As the New Mexico legislature geared up for the 2022 budget session, research and polling firm

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BSP Research released a statewide survey revealing a large segment of the state's Latino population, including immigrants, continues to struggle financially as a result of the pandemic. A thousand families were polled in December, and a significant percentage indicated a loss of income, increased debt, exclusion from government stimulus rebates and unemployment benefits, inability to pay basic household bills, and an overall need for additional economic support.

Some of the poll's key findings include:

28 percent of Hispanics across the state earned less than \$20,000 in 2020.

60 percent have \$1,000 or less in savings for financial emergencies and 35 percent have less than \$100.

24 percent have a family member who died of COVID-19.

28 percent reported that either they or someone in their household has had COVID-19 (The only other demographic with a higher number is that of Native Americans).

30 percent have had difficulty paying their bills or utilities.

26 percent had to spend all their savings or went into debt.

28 percent borrowed money from friends or family to get by and 19 percent took out high interest loans from payday loan shops.

24 percent are not confident they can pay for current basic living expenses like food, housing, utilities, and medical care.

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Across the board, Hispanics in rural communities are faring worse economically than those in urban areas, and Latina women are facing especially hard times.

During the press conference Marcela Díaz, the executive director of the statewide immigrant organization Somos Un Pueblo Unido (Somos) explained why the survey was done.

“The economic relief working group formed in April of 2020 at the onset of the pandemic, and we did it because we wanted to narrow the information gap between governments and the Latino immigrant community and the Spanish speaking community,” Díaz stated. “So we wanted to make sure we were getting really timely and up to date and correct information about all things COVID to our community.

“But we also wanted to make sure that our policymakers at every level of government were hearing directly from our communities,” she said.

“This survey makes clear that while many Latino families across the state have been able to leverage government resources to help them get back on their feet during one of the most challenging periods in state history, there are many households in New Mexico that continue to struggle,” Dr. Gabriel Sanchez from BSP Research said. “The legislature has the resources at their disposal to help these families and the survey finds that the majority of Latinos support providing more direct support right now to those most in need.”

Some local lawmakers were at the press conference and made statements showing their support for the Hispanic community.

“[These statistics] should give us pause,” Kassandra Gandara, a councilor from the Las Cruces City Council said. “As a city council working on reducing homelessness, poverty, [and] food insecurity ... I am advocating that our state officials use budget surplus and American Rescue Plan Act funding for inclusive economic recovery here in our beautiful state of New Mexico.”

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New Mexico has announced a predicted \$1.6 billion surplus in the state's general fund, which is fueled largely by record levels of oil and natural gas production.

"Our legislators need to recognize the ongoing problem and help fill the gap with the American Rescue Plan Act funding," Anna Hansen, a Santa Fe County Commissioner, stated. "Our community deserves and needs our help."

Survey responders were also asked to identify the most important policy issues the governor and state legislature of New Mexico should address in their upcoming session and the highest priority, according to the survey, is to "help New Mexicans struggling financially due to the pandemic."

Mirna Lazcano, a woman from Albuquerque spoke about her family's situation during the press conference.

"Although my husband is an essential construction worker, we were excluded from both state and federal stimulus, unemployment, and many other forms of pandemic relief," Lazcano explained.

Lazcano stated that her family got COVID-19, which led to medical debt and lost wages for her husband, because he didn't have paid sick leave.

"The pandemic isn't over," Lazcano stated. "The state must continue to invest in relief programs."

Forty-five local elected officials from several cities, counties, and school boards in New Mexico sent a letter to the legislature and the governor on Jan. 13 calling for the use of American Rescue Plan Act funding for COVID-19 economic relief to families who were ineligible for the tens of thousands of dollars in federal stimulus checks.

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“The lack of cash relief for significant segments of our communities will continue to result in homelessness, food insecurity, reluctance to seek health care, increased debt, and reliance on local charities, and predatory loans,” local elected officials stated in the letter. “It is also money that is not recirculating in our local economies, an essential component in ensuring a robust and inclusive recovery.”

“Too many immigrant workers and families from rural communities were left out of federal and state stimulus dollars and had little access to safety net services,” Díaz explained. “These discriminatory and unconscionable exclusions continue to have devastating economic and health effects on thousands of New Mexicans.”

“In order to forge an inclusive and fair recovery, the legislature must ensure the 30 percent of Latino families who fell far behind the rest of New Mexico can catch up,” Díaz concluded.

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