

PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY

The California Latino Policy Roundtable

On October 29, 2001, the National Latino Behavioral Health Association (NLBHA) sponsored the California Latino Policy Roundtable (CLPR). The intent was to collectively dialog on Latino mental health priority issues in California. Among the CLPR participants were academics, practitioners, consumer/family advocates and governmental leaders. Data from research conducted by **Sergio Aguilar-Gaxiola, PhD**, concerning Latino mental health utilization in California data was among the presentations intended to illustrate that legitimate arguments exist which can be used to develop effective public policy that may better serve Latino populations.

The Director of California Department of Mental Health, Dr. Stephen W. Mayberg discussed how the State Department of Mental Health may engage issues and concerns that will shape Latino policy. He conveyed the importance of looking towards specific resources such as the California Endowment, and continuing the implementation of the Cultural Competence Plan.

The Substance Abuse and Crime Prevention Act of 2000, Proposition 36, was also discussed, by **Kathryn P. Jett**, the Director of California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs. According to Jett, because Prop 26 substantially changes judicial processes and drug treatment systems, it will have a notable impact on Latino clients. This proposition enables a shift in focus of the judicial process from incarceration of drug offenders to treatment programs. One of the future challenges of Proposition 36 discussed, was developing culturally competent programs.

A brief review of the cultural competence component in the Guiding Principles, published by the National Institute on Drug Abuse was made by William Demers, the president of County Alcohol and Drug Program Administrators Association. He offered four dimensions of service that apply when interacting with clients of different cultures. Sensitivity is the first, which is awareness of the existence and nature of the nuances of one's own and other cultures. Competence, meaning interpersonal, communication and practice skills reflecting understanding and appreciation of the cultural differences and similarities within and among ethnically and linguistically diverse groups. Appropriateness, being awareness of cultural traditions. And finally, relevance, which is the program-structure being representative of the individuals and communities served.

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