

## 6 Increasing the Latina/o Health Professional Pipeline

Although Latinos account for almost 14% of the total U.S. population, they comprise only 4.6% of physicians in the United States. In 2004, out of a total of 884,974 physicians, 20,984 of them were Latino and 6,951 of them were Latina, making Latino physicians only 3.2% of all physicians, compared to 47.8% of physicians being white (421,659 white physicians).<sup>i</sup> Latino representation in the field of nursing is even smaller, accounting for only 4.3% of nurses in 2005<sup>ii</sup>, while only 2.8% of pharmacists were Latino. Although more people of color applied to medical school in 2000, fewer were accepted than in 1998 and 1999. In 2000, 17,546 of the 37,137 minority applicants were accepted to medical school, and only 545 of those accepted identified as either Mexican-American (415) or Puerto Rican (130). In 2004, the total number of Latinos applying to medical school was 2,545 (representing 7.1% of all applicants), in which 1,242 were accepted and 1,175 matriculated (representing 7% of all matriculants).<sup>iii</sup> Of those matriculated, Latina women represented 49% of all Latinos,<sup>iv</sup> reflecting a growth trend of Latinas applying to medical school. Between, 1980 and 2004, the number of Latina women graduates increase from 93 to 485. While the trend is promising, the raw data is grim. However, it is comforting to know that many of these applicants who graduate intend to give back by serving underserved communities; approximately 33% of graduating Latino medical students stated as such, whereas only 18.4% of Whites reported such plans.<sup>v</sup>

The recruitment of Latino health personnel is an important vehicle to increase access and quality of care for Latinas. Latino health personnel are more likely to be able to bridge the language gap that often deters Latinos from seeking prompt care or interferes with the patients' ability to understand and follow through on health care instructions. Latino health professionals are also more likely to understand cultural belief systems and to work within this context to support health promotion, disease prevention and early medical intervention when needed.

To increase the number of Latina/o health and allied health professionals, the following recommendations are offered:

### Policy Recommendations

- ☑ Support efforts to create federal and state funded scholarships, tuition reimbursement and loan forgiveness programs, and other incentives aimed at increasing the number of Latinas/os in medicine, health and the sciences.
- ☑ Support efforts to fund health career mentoring programs for Latina/o youth in order to develop a larger cadre of future Latino health professionals.
- ☑ Support efforts by the Health Careers Opportunity Program, Hispanic Centers of Excellence, and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to expand the pool of Latino health researchers.

# National Latina Institute for Reproductive Health Blueprint for Action

- ☑ Support coalition building and workgroup formation amongst Latino health professionals in order to foster learning and understanding of the barriers faced by Latinas in accessing reproductive health services.

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<sup>i</sup> Minority Affairs Consortium (MAC), Number of Male Physicians by Race/Ethnicity (2004), *available at* <http://www.ama-ass.org>

<sup>ii</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, Quick Facts on Registered Nurses, *available at* <http://www.dol.gov/wb/factsheets/Qf-nursing-05.htm>

<sup>iii</sup> Association of American Medical Colleges, Minorities in Medical Education: Facts & Figures (2005), *available at* <http://www.im.org/AAIM/PublicPolicy/Docs/AAMCMIM05.pdf>

<sup>iv</sup> Id.

<sup>v</sup> Id.