

**Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK**  
C/o Address LAWRS, Tindlemanor  
52-54 Featherstone Street  
London, EC1Y 8RT

[www.clauk.org.uk](http://www.clauk.org.uk)



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28<sup>th</sup> May, 2020

Professor Kevin Fenton  
National Director for Health and Wellbeing  
Public Health England  
CC: Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock  
Director of Health Protection, Yvonne Doyle  
Director of Health Improvement, John Newton

**Dear Professor Kevin Fenton**

**RE:** Latin Americans and COVID-19

We wish you warm congratulations on your appointment to lead the government's review into factors impacting health outcomes from COVID-19 and welcome this much needed review to address the needs of ethnic minority groups.

As the review looks to provide insight into emerging evidence to suggest COVID-19 may be having a disproportionate impact on different groups, we would like to share with you our joint learnings and concerns witnessed in the country's COVID-19 response in the Latin American community. We would also like to kindly request a meeting with you to see how we can best support Public Health England to ensure the inclusion of Latin Americans in its response.

**About us:**

The Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK (CLAUK) is an advocacy coalition founded in 2012, and currently made of eleven UK registered charities and community organisations working together to raise awareness and understanding of the issues facing the Latin American community in the UK.

**Key facts<sup>i</sup>:**

- Latin Americans (LatAms) are one of the country's fastest-growing non-EU ethnic groups but are rendered "invisible" by official statistics.
- In 2011, there were 250,000 people of Latin American origin – born or with ancestry in the Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries of the Americas, and many more followed in secondary migration fleeing the financial crisis in Southern Europe.
- Roughly half live in London, where they form the eighth-largest ethnic community. Nationally, they are already comparable in size to the British Asian population in 1991.

- Over 40% of Latin Americans have experienced workplace abuse and exploitation. 11% of Latin American workers are illegally paid below the National Minimum Wage, which is 10 times higher than the average rate for the UK population (1.1%).

### **Covid-19 challenges identified by The Coalition of Latin Americans in the UK - CLAUUK:**

- **Unknown official impact:** Despite their important contribution to the functioning of the country economically, socially and culturally, very little is known officially about the impact of Covid-19 in the LatAms community in the UK. Globally, Latin America has become a hotspot for the virus.
- **Invisible in data collection systems:** The lack of knowledge is the result of lack of formal ways to collect information on LatAms as there is currently no category in ethnic monitoring that would allow to identify the community. With a large proportion having dual citizenship, either EU or British, LatAms impacted by COVID9 are not being recorded or misrecorded in different categories.
- **Low access to health services:** there are clear indicator of exclusion among LatAms when it comes to access to health services: 1 in 6 Latin Ams are not registered with a GP; nearly 7 out of 10 have been to a dentist in the UK; and our own rapid-HIV testing campaign found 2 people who tested reactive in only 137 tests (prevalence rate of 1.5%).
- **High-risk employment:** while a highly educated population with high employment rates (75%), the majority are unable to fully utilise our professional skills due to language and migration barriers. As such, more than half are employed in low-skilled and low-paid jobs in cleaning, catering and hospitality services.
- **Economic vulnerability:** Many work in poor and exploitative conditions. We work relatively long and fragmented hours. Many jobs are only available for 3-4 hours at a time and so people have to combine several part-time jobs, traveling across the city in public transportation in order to make ends meet.
- **Housing and lack of social distancing:** Difficulties in obtaining adequate and affordable housing are a significant concern. Almost one-third live in overcrowded accommodation shared with other households, primarily in the private rented sector. In addition, with economic vulnerability, this makes social distancing impossible for many.
- **Immigration status and language barrier:** They are critical to enhancing quality of life, access to services and opportunities, and are crucial to integration. Language barrier is the main obstacle for our community.
- **Mixed messages:** Due to language barriers, many of us access information from LatAms outlets. This includes conflicting information. For example, Brazilian public health officials are encouraging social mixing.
- **Discrimination:** The majority of Latin Americans (70%), including the second generation, perceive discrimination to be a major barrier to integration.

### **What needs to change?**

- **Ethnic recognition:** Need to include a 'Latin American' category in data collection systems. This is particularly important for the Greater London Authority, nation-wide public agencies and local and health authorities.
- **Individual Analysis Report:** It is imperative to understand the impact of Covid-19 in the LatAms community. While this can't be done using standard ONS categories, the implementation of an individual analysis report for the community can be a good step forward. It will not capture second generation LatAms but it will help paint the picture.

- **Provide information in Spanish and Portuguese:** information provided by Public Health England [was distributed in 12 languages](#). None of them in Spanish or Portuguese, the main languages used by LatAms. It is crucial this is addressed to avoid conflicting messages.
- **Employment rights:** Government, trade unions, employers and other civil society groups need to increase awareness of employment rights and provide access to advice, given the large number of Latin Americans experiencing labour rights infringements.
- **Public services and benefits:** Statutory health providers, particularly those delivering primary care, need to tackle inequalities of access to health care facing Latin Americans. Public Health departments in areas of concentration should include LatAms in local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments to better understand the needs of the community. Take-up campaigns should outline available services, how they can be obtained and include details of eligibility. The focus should be on areas with significant Latin American populations.
- **Immigration:** Legal aid provision for immigration advice is vital for migrants with little or no understanding of English and the legal system in the UK such as Latin Americans. This is particularly needed for women experiencing violence who rely on such assistance to extricate themselves from violence in the home and other spheres.
- **Supporting community services:** Whilst there are concentrations of the Latin American population in certain wards and boroughs in London, it is a community spread across the capital. Funders and commissioners need to take account of this and ensure pan-London and sub- regional funds are available to support community organisations addressing the needs of the whole community.

To date we have seen no real progress on addressing the needs of Latin Americans. Not in the Covid-19 response nor other public health interventions. With some limited examples across the capital, there are no national initiatives addressing the needs of our community.

Urgent action must be taken to support the health and wellbeing of Latin Americans in the UK. We are valuable members of the UK society and have made important financial and cultural contributions to this nation.

We remain committed to working with you to achieve our collective goal of improving the health and wellbeing of Latin Americans in the UK. We would very much welcome a meeting with you to see how we can best support and ensure the inclusion of Latin Americans in the public health response in London and the UK. To schedule a meeting please contact [Noel@lawrs.org.uk](mailto:Noel@lawrs.org.uk)

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,




Natalia Perez & Santiago Peluffo  
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### Supported by:

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PC Juan Pimienta -Metropolitan Police Ibero American Association  
Dr María Soledad Montañez-Latin American Provider Led Group

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<sup>i</sup> Berg, M. L. (2019) Super-diversity, austerity, and the production of precarity: Latin Americans in London, *Critical Social Policy*, Volume 39 Issue 2, May 2019  
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