

FW: OMH Celebrates National Hispanic Heritage Month!

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Saludos/Greetings,

As we celebrate National Hispanic Heritage Month this year, the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) recognizes and honors the remarkable contributions and commitment that so many Hispanic and Latinx individuals have made to the mental health field. OMH recognizes the unique challenges faced by Hispanic and Latinx individuals and reaffirms its commitment to ensuring marginalized, underserved and minority communities receive equal access to quality mental health services and supports.

OMH is committed to holding the mental health system accountable for making progressive change and breaking down barriers that prevent special population groups from accessing services. The Agency continues its efforts to diversify our workforce and ensure it is reflective of the populations being served. Some of these efforts include the creation of the SUNY & CUNY diversity pipeline program, participating in diversity focused job fairs and utilizing language on job postings that showcases OMH's commitment to hiring a diverse workforce. Additionally, OMH continues to develop and distribute content to educate providers and the community on best practice approaches to serving individuals from special population groups. These resources include the [Spotlight on Hispanic and Latinx individuals](#).

Dr. Audrey Erazo-Trivino

We would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the amazing work of Associate Commissioner Dr. Audrey Erazo-Trivino, who demonstrates an unwavering commitment and dedication to OMH's mission and works tirelessly to improve conditions for special population groups.

Dr. Erazo-Trivino was appointed in January 2023 by OMH to the position of Associate Commissioner for the Office of Prevention and Health Initiatives. For almost thirty years, she has focused her career on improving the mental health and well-being of individuals across the lifespan, with a particular focus on improving conditions for Black and Latino communities. She worked tirelessly in community-based settings in New York City and the Hudson Valley, both in direct service and in administration, to champion equitable

access of mental health service delivery for those most vulnerable. As a bilingual and bicultural psychologist, Dr. Erazo-Trivino is highly familiar with the barriers related to effective mental health practice in Latino communities and actively engages in anti-stigma work to reduce those barriers. Her research interests include qualitative research that examines the effects of trauma on education, the family dynamics that lead to such trauma, and the culturally adapted/responsive interventions needed to effectively intervene.

Dr. Erazo-Trivino is the proud daughter of immigrants from South America (Ecuador and Venezuela) and is the first member of her family to achieve a doctorate degree. Born and raised in Yonkers, New York, she is proud to have her roots tied to such a diverse community and that upbringing continuously fuels her passion and commitment to working in the public mental health sector. As an adolescent, she has fond memories of her Venezuelan grandmother teaching her how to cook authentic meals from their native country and was always reminded to keep their family traditions alive through social connectedness. Dr. Erazo-Trivino's grandmother, although only having achieved an elementary school education, instilled in her both a lifelong passion for education and learning as well as service to others. Because of her cultural humility and vast clinical experiences, Dr. Erazo-Trivino is sought out to provide her expertise as a Latina professional in a variety of forums including webinars, trainings, and keynote speaker presentations. She proudly celebrates and champions her Hispanic heritage every day, not just during Hispanic Heritage month, and aspires to live in a world where cultural differences can be fully embraced and celebrated.

Our Partners in the Community

OMH would also like to recognize the extraordinary efforts by two community-based organizations providing mental health preventive services to meet the needs of Hispanic & Latino New Yorkers: Hispanic Counseling Center and Comunilife.

Hispanic Counseling Center (HCC) participates in the Agency's Community Mental Health Promotion & Support (COMHPS) program. The goal of COMHPS is to help New Yorkers with mental health needs that could benefit from supportive services provided by a trained paraprofessional, as well as to promote behavioral health and wellness in local communities. Eight COMHPS providers around the state offer community outreach and engagement, support groups, screenings for clinical and social needs, and referrals to licensed mental health professionals when needed. Priority populations in COMHPS include communities of color and the Agency provides both cultural competency trainings and mental health wellness resources in Spanish to ensure COMHPS providers are positioned to reach Latino New Yorkers.

HCC's mission is to enhance the strengths of Long Island's families and children through bilingual, bicultural counseling, prevention, vocational and educational services to enrich their lives, foster economic independence and nurture dreams for generations to come. As a COMHPS provider, HCC conducts a variety of supportive activities for individuals, families, and groups, as well as public education and organized recreational activities in Nassau and Suffolk Counties. COMHPS services are intended to be delivered outside clinic walls and HCC leverages a robust network of community partners to reach people in schools, senior centers, faith communities, youth groups, and other community-based locations. In addition, HCC conducts community outreach at local events, such as the recent celebration of Columbia's Independence Day in the Town of Hempstead.

Comunilife is active in another Agency prevention initiative serving the Hispanic and Latinx population. In recognition of the unique cultural factors that must be considered in the development of suicide prevention strategies for at-risk groups, the Agency is supporting five Suicide Prevention Programs for young people belonging to underserved communities, including racial and ethnic minorities and LGBTQI+ youth and young adults. These programs offer culturally tailored supportive services for individuals and groups, family education, community engagement and outreach, academic/vocational support, youth development activities, risk assessment, crisis management and referral to needed resources including behavioral health treatment.

Through this Agency initiative, Comunilife has expanded their successful Life Is Precious™ (LIP) program to the growing Hispanic and Latinx communities in Yonkers and Poughkeepsie. LIP is an after-school program for Latina teen girls designed to alleviate the risk factors associated with Latina adolescent suicide. Core components of the program include art and music therapy, academic support, and wellness activities. LIP makes a special effort to involve the relatives of each member enrolled in the program through case management services, one-on-one family peer support, and workshops for parents/caregivers. Program participants refer to LIP as their "home away from home." Indeed, LIP facilities are designed to be safe,

nonjudgmental, and welcoming spaces, many with kitchen areas for participants, families, and staff to prepare meals, learn about healthy eating practices, and dine together. Artwork created by the girls covers the walls with encouraging and inspiring messages.

Join us as we honor National Hispanic Heritage Month, the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) extends its unwavering commitment to ensuring equitable access to mental health services and celebrating the remarkable contributions of Hispanic and Latinx individuals like Dr. Audrey Erazo-Trivino. We also applaud the outstanding efforts of community-based organizations such as Hispanic Counseling Center and Comunilife, whose supports and services enriches the lives of Hispanic and Latinx communities and promotes equitable care. Together, we will continue to strive for a future where inclusivity and equity are afforded to all.

Con Orgullo/With Pride,

Talia

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