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Latino Health Lags

Legislators have a more detailed, if grimmer, picture of the state's need for improved health care, thanks to a study by the Hartford-based Hispanic Health Council.

The nonprofit advocacy group's findings will be a valuable tool in the anticipated push for universal health care. The numbers underscore the need for a comprehensive solution to the growing ranks of the uninsured.

Although Latinos make up 9 percent of the state's population, the study shows, they constitute 40 percent of the uninsured. They also account for a quarter of AIDS cases, experience higher rates of certain cancers than non-Latino whites, and have a higher mortality rate for diabetes and related illnesses.

Latinos have higher rates of sexually transmitted diseases, infant mortality, oral health

problems and pediatric asthma than the general population. Almost half of patients report confusion due to language issues. No wonder the health council describes the situation as a crisis.

POOR PROGNOSIS Use study as fodder for substantive reform

Among the saddest findings is that nearly a quarter of Latino children who are eligible for the state's Husky health insurance program were not enrolled at the time of the study. It is incumbent on policy-makers to figure out

why not, and up to advocates to make sure their clients understand their rights and take advantage of this important route to well-being.

What can be more disheartening than people, especially children, suffering unnecessarily from preventable and treatable conditions when help is within arms' reach?

May these numbers add a greater sense of urgency to the debate on health care reform.