

News Release
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Media Contacts:

Leslie W. Taylor, 501-686-8998
Wireless phone: 501-951-7260
leslie@uams.edu

Yavonda Chase, 501-686-8994
Wireless phone: 501-416-0354
yavonda@uams.edu

**Researchers Find Shortage of Mental Health Providers
for Arkansas' Hispanic Population**

LITTLE ROCK — Arkansas' Hispanic population is likely to have difficulty finding in-state, Spanish speaking licensed mental health professionals.

A study disclosed that there are not enough Spanish speaking mental health professionals to serve Arkansas' growing Hispanic community.

George Pro, Ph.D., a University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences' Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health assistant professor, was the lead author of the study, [published by the *Psychiatric Services* journal](#). The project used nationwide info from the 2014-2019 National Mental Health Services Survey.

“This has probably always been a problem in Arkansas,” Pro said. “But it has only gotten worse over time as the Spanish speaking population in Arkansas has continuously grown. It's now become an issue that must be addressed.”

In 2016 there were roughly 207,000 Hispanic residents in Arkansas. By 2020, the state's Hispanic population had grown to 229,000 — an 11% increase in only four years.

Arkansas' situation is part of a national norm. Data shows there are only a few states that have a growing rate of Spanish speaking mental health professionals available.

“In 44 of the 50 states, there's a decrease in specialty mental health services offered in Spanish,” Pro said. “The downward trend is worse in the places with the fastest growing Spanish speaking populations like South Dakota. We're seeing more Spanish speaking people moving to states where there are relatively fewer Hispanic residents but where Hispanic populations are growing rapidly.”

There are other factors as well.

As of 2015, Arkansas had 265 specialty mental health treatment facilities, and 79 of them offered Spanish speaking services. By 2019, the state only had 202 specialty mental health treatment facilities, with 32 giving clients access to a Spanish speaking staff member.

Additionally, like many other demographics, the negative stigma of mental health impacts the Hispanic culture, too.

“For a lot of people, talking to family and friends about needing mental health treatment can sometimes lead to stigma if your family and friends don’t understand that mental health issues are real,” Pro said.

Also, the potential cost of mental health services is a roadblock. The research team learned that many Hispanic Arkansans don’t have health insurance.

Arkansas being a rural state is an additional issue. A lot of the state’s Spanish speaking population resides in the rural regions, according to Pro.

“The distance to travel can be tough,” he said. “If you have to drive 50 miles or more to see someone for health care, that can be a problem. We’ve seen physical health provider shortages across the state. The same can be said about mental health provider shortages, and it’s mostly in rural areas.”

“If there aren’t mental health facilities to go to in the first place, that’s an issue,” Pro said. “This state has a significant Hispanic population living outside of Central or Northwest Arkansas, the state’s two most urban areas.”

Pro suggested that Arkansans taking mental health issues seriously and getting the proper treatment is key to solving the problem. Once that’s done, there will be an increase in mental health services, which would naturally increase the likelihood of Spanish speaking mental health professionals being available.

“We need to focus on the availability of mental health experts and then also work to improve health care use,” he said. “But we have to make it a point to have Spanish speaking mental health experts who can work with people who need the services.”

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