



United Community Center Latino Geriatric Center *A Lifeline for the Hispanic Community on a Journey with Alzheimer's*

What Led to the Latino Geriatric Center

Al Castro, MS, CSW, is the Program Director at the United Community Center (UCC) in Milwaukee. The UCC provides programs to Hispanics in Milwaukee County in the areas of education, cultural arts, recreation, community development, and health and human services. With approximately 13% of Hispanics age 65 or older having Alzheimer's or another dementia, cognitive health has been a major focus for Castro and his team. The UCC established the Latino Geriatric Center in 2007, with all services offered in Spanish. It provides cognitive assessments, along with caregiver support and education about dementia, and also an Adult Day Center which specializes in day services for dementia, along with other health care services.

Today the Center has a solid foundation for supporting the community, but this was not always the case. "Over the last decade, we have worked very hard to establish the UCC and specifically the Latino Geriatric Center – the only specialty geriatric center in Wisconsin," Castro shared. "There are many factors that precipitated the need for the UCC that we have worked to overcome."

Historical Challenges for Latinos Receiving Support

- **Lack of specialty memory clinics for Latinos** - Historically, primary physicians weren't always screening for dementia and didn't have the tools to diagnose. We know that 85% of Hispanics say it's important for Alzheimer's and dementia care providers to understand their ethnic or racial background, so relying on interpreters was an automatic roadblock in the past. There was also a lack of information/resources in Spanish. And if a Latino was diagnosed, it was not clear where to send them for care.
- **Lack of Awareness for Alzheimer's** – Many Hispanic families don't view memory loss as a diagnosis, but rather just an aspect of aging, so the common signs are often missed.
- **Stigma** – There is stigma in the Hispanic community around memory loss, and families view it as disrespectful to talk about an elder's decline. The term dementia also translates to "demented" in Spanish, which implies a type of mental illness.
- **Caregiver burnout** - The term caregiver doesn't exist in Spanish and caring for a family member is just an assumed responsibility for younger generations. There are often multi-generational households, where a "sandwich generation" caregiver is taking care of children, as well as an elderly parent. Work schedules, and being forced to leave an elder alone, often present the biggest challenge for caregivers. Education needs to happen to prepare that caregiver for the progression of memory loss, and make them aware of resources, for a time when things become too challenging to handle alone.



Latino Memory Clinic
414-649-2808
www.unitedcc.org

Meeting Families Where They Are

"A huge barrier to diagnosis was that, even after a primary doctor referral, families would not come in to the clinic," Castro shared. "We launched the Mobile Memory Clinic and went to the homes of families so it was more comfortable to begin the discussion. COVID-19 has limited our mobile outreach temporary, but we are still conducting tele-health and onsite assessments to meet our families where they are comfortable. A memory screen is the first step and includes a nurse and social worker team speaking with families. In 2020, we were able to conduct 64 of these screens. This is not a diagnosis, but where education starts happening. The team looks and speaks their language, which puts many families at ease. After a memory screen, 93% of their families accept referral to go see a doctor. We are fortunate to have a Spanish-speaking doctor, Piero Antuono, MD, who comes to the clinic twice a month and is a huge asset in our efforts to diagnosis and get families care."

Resource Utilization Growing

"Today there is a clearer path for helping families who have been diagnosed with a cognitive impairment," Castro said. "The younger generations of Hispanics are more comfortable taking advantage of services and primary doctors have become more familiar with the UCC and referring families. We continue to encourage Hispanic families to take advantage of resources available to them."

Geriatric Center Resources include:

- Adult Day Center – The concept of a day center is a new concept in the Hispanic community. Even nationwide, day centers are limited for Hispanics, and primarily exist in CA, TX and FL. But the UCC is working with families to overcome the concept that it's an "institution" and highlighting the music, Latin food, and environment (painted like a Latino village) to encourage families to take advantage of this resource.
- Alzheimer's Association – The Alzheimer's Association partners with the UCC to provide education, support group opportunities, caregiver resources and 24/7 Helpline support (in Spanish). Virginia Zerpa is the Alzheimer's Association's Community Outreach Coordinator for the Hispanic community. Alzheimer's Association resources will help improve the quality of life of the person living with memory loss and help reduce caregiver burnout.

Future Plans for the UCC

"We're very fortunate to have an amazing clinical team and such strong partners in the community such as the Alzheimer's Association, Medical College of Wisconsin and the Wisconsin Alzheimer's Institute," Castro said. "We would like to see our service utilization grow in the future so we continue to look for ways to create awareness in the community."



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