

# Latino health group pushes immunization

## Bilingual volunteers will initiate project in Hispanic community

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An aggressive effort to increase immunization among children up to age 4 will begin this month on the near south side.

The Latino Health Organization, which attempts to promote healthy behaviors and environments in Milwaukee's Hispanic community, will use 10 bilingual neighborhood volunteers to initiate the project in the 53204 Zip Code, says Maria Gamez, the organization's executive director.

Noting that many families in the target area are undocumented immigrants, Gamez says the

effort will help break down the barrier of fear that prevents many of them from seeking out immunization services.

"In the past this population has been very difficult to reach," Gamez says. "One woman in the (volunteer) training sessions said her husband told her that if they tried to immunize their children they would be deported.

"They feel more relaxed and secure if the outreach effort comes from a neighbor or a church member," Gamez says, adding that some volunteers also are undocumented immigrants.

The Latino Health Organization, which operates out of the Sixteenth Street Community Health Center, 1032 S. 16th St., was created in 1992 because of other barriers to health services in the Hispanic community, Gamez says.

"Even educated people with health insurance have difficulty understanding the health care system," Gamez says. "For people who are unemployed, uninsured, with little education, and little understanding of English, health care resources are even harder to access."

### Follows Similar Project

The immunization project comes on the heels of the organization's Latino Neighborhood Health Promoters Project, initiated last year to reduce socio-cultural barriers to maternal, child and reproductive health care, Gamez says.

That project, like the immunization project, recruited its 21 volunteers from church, school and community organizations and organized them into focus groups, Gamez says.

After training in the areas of health issues, health mainte-

nance organizations and health care resources, the volunteers were able to disperse information on health risks and resources for free or low-cost health care to their respective groups and organizations — as well as to their neighbors, Gamez says.

Referrals for the immunization project will come from the neighborhood health promoters, from the organizations from which they were recruited, from community-based organizations that work with families, and from surveys at the 16th St. clinic, says project coordinator Adriana Rosas.

Once contacted by volunteers, if people referred do not have insurance or are not registered at the 16th St. clinic, project volunteers will take them and their children to clinics throughout the city that offer free immunizations, Rosas says.