

# Informal social networks better at encouraging Hispanics to prepare for disasters, study finds

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Lay health teachers who engaged Hispanics inside their social networks were more effective than mailers at encouraging participants to prepare disaster plans.

Historically, authorities have used broad media campaigns to encourage the public to prepare for disasters — an approach that has proven largely ineffective. For this new study, UCLA researchers sought to test novel, culturally tailored, informal [social networking](#) approaches to improve disaster preparedness, using data on 231 [Hispanics](#) in Los Angeles County.

Researchers randomly assigned study participants to attend pláticas — discussion groups led by a lay health teacher — or to receive culturally tailored mailers encouraging them to store bottled water and food and devise a family communication plan in preparation for a disaster. They found that 93.3 percent of plática participants who did not have water at the beginning did so at follow-up, compared with 66.7 percent of those who received mailers; 91.7 percent of the plática group stored food, compared with 60.6 percent of mailer recipients; and 70.4 percent of plática participants had a family communication plan, compared with 42.3 percent of mailer recipients.

This study is the first to use sophisticated techniques to improve disaster preparedness among Hispanics. It shows that lay health teachers who

engage people inside their social networks and use culturally tailored content were more effective than mailers at encouraging participants to stockpile water and food and create a family communication plan.

**More information:** The study has been published in the December issue of the *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*.

Provided by University of California Los Angeles

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