

# Mental health care treatment for immigrants needs retooling, according to task force

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The methods psychologists and other health-care providers are using to treat immigrants to the United States need to be better tailored to deal with their specific cultures and needs, according to a task force report released by the American Psychological Association.

The report of APA's Presidential Task Force Report on Immigration presents a detailed look at America's [immigrant population](#) and outlines how psychologists can address the needs of [immigrants](#) across domains of practice, research, education and policy.

"We have identified an urgent need in scientific research and [clinical settings](#) to consider the unique aspects of immigrant populations, particularly with regard to culture and language," said task force Chair Carola Suárez-Orozco, PhD.

Immigrants face psychological implications of racism, discrimination and racial profiling, while their expressions of distress vary across [cultures](#), the report points out.

Most evidence-based psychological treatments currently used with immigrants are based on research performed with samples consisting of ethnic minorities rather than immigrants, according to the report. Current psychological assessment tools, such as tests and batteries, often are not adapted to account for culture and language, it notes.

"Rather than approaching culture through a preset middle-class

American framework, the research should use methodologies to understand the worldview of the immigrant population," the report states.

A surprising finding from the review of current data is that first-generation immigrant populations fare better than subsequent generations in physical and behavioral health, as well as some educational outcomes, even though they frequently face multiple stressors, such as poverty, difficult work environments, social isolation and less education.

"The implications are that programs to assist immigrants with adapting to life in their new country must value both the need to learn the ways of the new culture and the need to maintain a connection with the old," said Suárez-Orozco.

Among the report's other recommendations:

- Federal policy initiatives that support education and training in psychology to work with immigrants.
- Continuing education programs for practicing [psychologists](#) and other [mental health](#) professionals to address the needs and strengths of immigrants and their families.
- Training that includes prejudice reduction for teachers and other service providers who work with immigrants.
- Public awareness of the mental health impacts of detention and deportation on adults and their children, and policy initiatives for humane detention requirements and family reunification.
- Full equality of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender immigrants and their families in federal immigration laws and policies, including the recognition of "permanent partner" status eligibility for same-sex couples.

"Our hope is that increased understanding of the psychological factors related to the immigrant experience will improve decision-making," said Melba J.T. Vasquez, PhD, who convened the [task force](#) as APA's 2011 president. "Effective integration of immigrants in educational, work and communities is essential for this country's future."

**More information:** Report: "Crossroads: The Psychology of Immigration in the New Century, Report of the APA Presidential Task Force on Immigration," Executive Summary:  
[www.apa.org/pi/about/publicati...xecutive-summary.pdf](http://www.apa.org/pi/about/publicati...xecutive-summary.pdf)

Provided by American Psychological Association

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