

# CentroSOL working to include latinos and underserved populations in research studies

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Volunteers working for CentroSOL seek to improve health equity for Latinos and other underserved populations in the Greater Baltimore area. Credit: Graphic created by M.E. Newman using logo and photo courtesy of CentroSOL

Despite concerted efforts to remedy an ongoing disparity, research has shown that Latinos and other ethnic minorities have been historically underrepresented in medical research studies, especially clinical trials. Engaging Latinos has been particularly challenging because they often do not have equitable access to vital information that would lead them to participate. Additionally, Latinos often deal with health care providers and study coordinators who don't speak Spanish or are not trained to be culturally competent in working with the Latino community. Other barriers to research participation include poverty, housing instability, lack of transportation, mistrust and competing demands, such as child care and work schedules.

This is where Centro SOL (Center for Salud/Health and Opportunities for Latinos), a Johns Hopkins Medicine research center, is helping to bridge the gap. Since its inception in 2013, Centro SOL's

mission has been to improve health care and [health education](#) for Latinos in the Baltimore [metropolitan region](#) by increasing their involvement in research studies.

"Centro Sol is committed to providing the best quality services for researchers and patients," says Sarah Polk, M.D., Sc.M., Centro Sol team member and assistant professor of pediatrics at the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine.

According to a report in the November 2020 issue of the *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved*, Centro SOL consulted from 2014 through 2019 with 77 researchers working for institutions such as The Johns Hopkins University, and its medical school and school of public health; the University of Maryland; the Maryland Institute College of Art; and out-of-state universities. The report documents how Centro SOL helped these investigators increase participation of Baltimore-area Latinos and others who have limited English proficiency in high-quality, culturally competent and ethical research studies by assisting with study planning, reviews of study materials, recruitment of participants and staff members, and translation services.

For example, the report describes how, during the six-year review period, Centro SOL helped researchers build relationships with its target population. Researchers, states the report, were given guidance on proven methods for communicating that help make prospective study recruits feel comfortable and enable them to clearly understand the potential risks and benefits of participating in a research study.

Centro SOL has worked in numerous [health care](#) and community settings to promote equity in health and opportunity for Latinos through both research-

and community-based programming. Centro SOL has developed close partnerships with key local leaders and organizations, such as Comité Latino de Baltimore, a community group that works to strengthen the region's Latino community, and Gallery Church, which has a predominantly Latino congregation.

Based on feedback from the researchers it has assisted, Centro SOL continues to refine and improve the services it offers.

**More information:** Amelia J. Brandt et al. Centro SOL Research Consultation Services: Improving Research with Limited English Proficiency Latinx Populations, *Journal of Health Care for the Poor and Underserved* (2020). DOI: [10.1353/hpu.2020.0111](https://doi.org/10.1353/hpu.2020.0111)

To learn more about Centro SOL, including its programs and services, go to [www.jhcentrosol.org](http://www.jhcentrosol.org).

Provided by Johns Hopkins University

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