

# Exploring Wellness with San Francisco's Latinx Community

By DreamSF Fellow Litzy Lujan, Director Lucia Obregon, and  
Coordinator Paloma Tracy



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# INTRODUCTION

## Purpose Statement

Founded in 2016, San Francisco Latino Parity and Equity Coalition (SFLPEC) is dedicated to ensuring equitable representation and resources for Latinos in San Francisco. Our Vision is a thriving and healthy Latino community in San Francisco, embodied through our four pillars: Community Safety, Health, Place, Workforce. We are deeply committed to uplifting the voices and experiences of those often marginalized within our community: children and youth, LGBTQIA+ individuals, newcomers and recent arrivals, the unhoused, and women. To do so, we unite 23 Latino-led agencies, boasting a cumulative workforce of over 900 employees and positively impacting over 60,000 individuals city-wide each year. Our advocacy efforts reach residents primarily in Districts 9, 10, 11, 5, and 6, crafting tailored solutions year-round for Latino families. Our vision entails coordinating and marketing a robust network of vital services while driving structural changes to combat racial disparities. Our collective impact initiative seeks to enhance equity in our communities through:

- Advocacy & policy change
- Pursuing financial investment in the Latino Community
- Data gathering and community outreach
- Connecting our community to available services

SFLPEC is committed to advancing equity and wellness within San Francisco's Latino and immigrant communities. As part of our ongoing efforts to ensure fair representation and access to vital services, we launched the Wellness Data-Gathering Project. This project aims to understand how community members define wellness, the resources they use, and the barriers they face in achieving overall wellness.

## Why Wellness?

Wellness is an essential metric because it reflects the overall quality of life for individuals, families, and communities. It encompasses more than just physical health—it includes emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, social, and spiritual dimensions. When people experience a sense of wellness, they are more likely to thrive at home, at work, and in their communities.

SFLPEC believes wellness is an urgent priority because community members continue to feel the impacts of the compounded trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic, ongoing displacement, systemic underinvestment, and increasing anti-immigrant rhetoric. Frontline organizations see firsthand how stress, instability, and isolation are impacting families' ability to engage, heal, and move forward, making it urgent to center wellness as both a starting point and a long-term goal for equitable recovery and resilience.

Consulting the community on wellness helps us understand and uncover the layered challenges communities face, including limited access to healthcare, experiences of discrimination, housing instability, language barriers, and the stress of navigating complex immigration systems. Understanding these realities through a wellness lens allows community-based organizations, service providers, and policymakers to design more effective, culturally responsive, and equitable solutions. Centering wellness ensures that efforts to support these communities are rooted in dignity, resilience, and lived experience. 1



# METHODOLOGY

The SFLPEC team, led by the Director, believes it is essential to remain attuned to the evolving needs of the community by consistently gathering real-time input. To achieve this, we use a method called *community data-gathering* – a participatory form of crowdsourcing that centers the voices of community members. This approach directly engages residents, inviting them to share their feelings, insights, and lived experiences through simple, interactive activities designed to be accessible, culturally responsive, and relevant.

## Data Collection:

Between February and April 2025, SFLPEC conducted outreach and in-person data collection through wellness-focused sessions held at community partner sites. These sessions were conducted primarily in Spanish to ensure accessibility for monolingual Spanish-speaking participants, although some sessions were also held in English to accommodate the diverse language needs of participants. We utilized a combination of focus group-style activities and wellness surveys to gather both qualitative and quantitative data. Each session was intentionally designed to create a safe and welcoming space for participants to reflect on their wellness and share their perspectives authentically.



# Data Collection Tools:

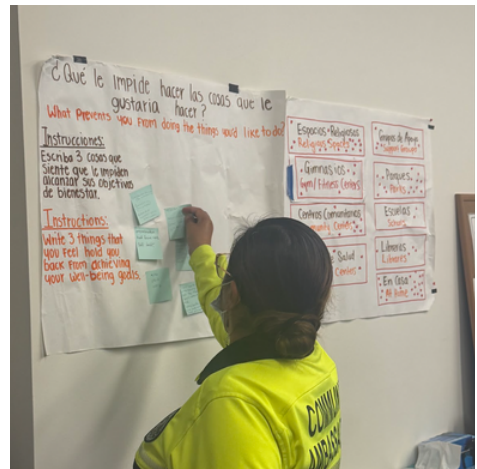
**Wellness Bingo Cards:** Participants marked activities they currently engage in and those they are interested in but lack access to, across the eight dimensions of wellness.

WELLNESS BINGO				
SLEEP AT LEAST 7-8HRS	ATTENDING RELIGIOUS EVENTS	THERAPY	CLASSES FOR NEW SKILL	GOING TO MUSEUMS, ART GALLERIES
VOLUNTEERING	SETTING FINANCIAL GOALS	READING	FAMILY TIME	LIVING FREE OF MOLD
ACCESS TO GREEN SPACES	WELLNESS GROUPS/ CLASSES	FREE SPACE	HAVE A SAVINGS ACCOUNT	REGULARLY EAT FRESH FOOD
BUDGET FOR MONTHLY EXPENSES	BODY MOVEMENT EX: STRETCHING, DANCE	COMMUNITY GROUPS AND CLUBS	JOURNALING	MEDITATION OR PRAYER
RECYCLE AND COMPOST	ATTENDING CULTURAL EVENTS	LOVE WHAT YOU DO FOR A LIVING	WATCHING DOCUMENTARIES	SETTING CAREER GOALS

**"Where Do You Go?" Boards:** Participants selected the top three places they frequent for their wellness, such as parks, community centers, religious institutions, etc.



**Post-it Notes Activity:** Participants were prompted to write down key barriers that prevent them from achieving their wellness goals.



# The Eight Dimensions of Wellness

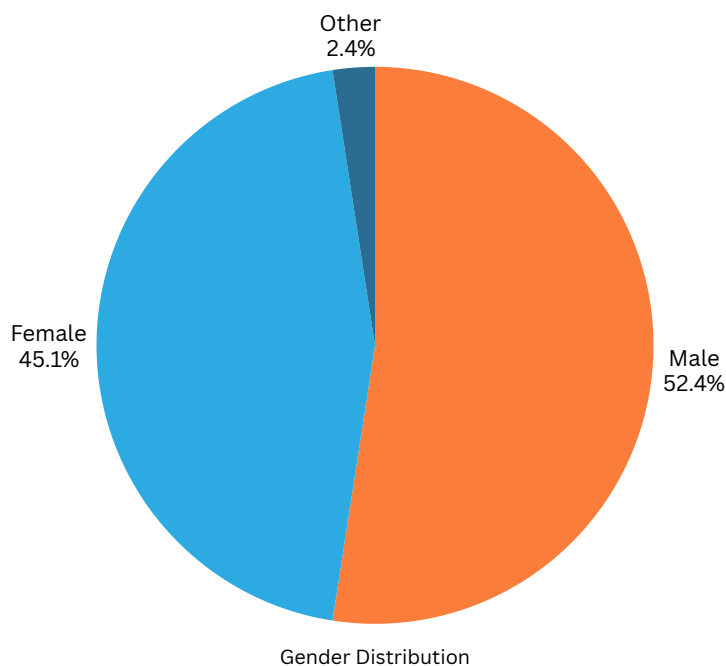
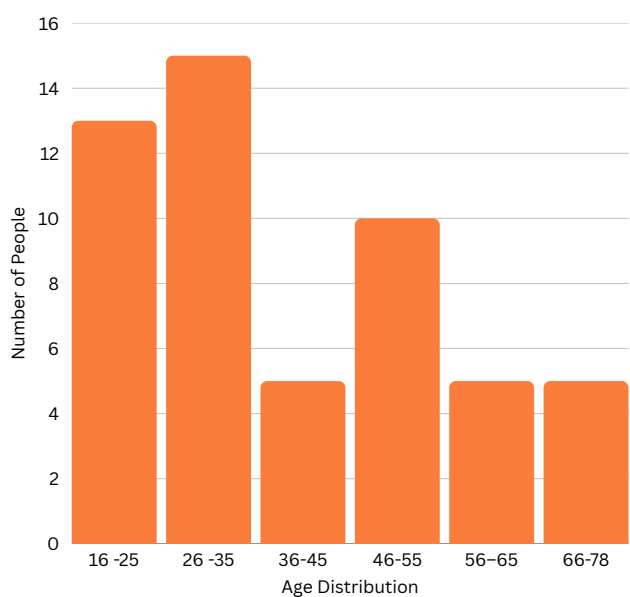
To ground our approach, we utilized the widely recognized *Eight Dimensions of Wellness* model, which provides a holistic framework for understanding the many interconnected factors that contribute to a person's overall wellness (SAMHSA). This model helped guide participants in reflecting on various aspects of their lives, encompassing not just physical health, during our data-gathering sessions.

The eight dimensions include:

- **Emotional** – Coping effectively with life and developing satisfying relationships.
- **Environmental** – Living in harmony with your surroundings and supporting safe, sustainable environments.
- **Financial** – Feeling satisfied with current and future financial situations.
- **Intellectual** – Recognizing creative abilities and seeking opportunities to expand knowledge and skills.
- **Occupational** – Experiencing personal satisfaction and enrichment through one's work.
- **Physical** – Understanding the importance of physical activity, rest, nutrition, and medical care.
- **Social** – Building a sense of connection, belonging, and a reliable support system.
- **Spiritual** – Cultivating a sense of purpose and meaning in life.

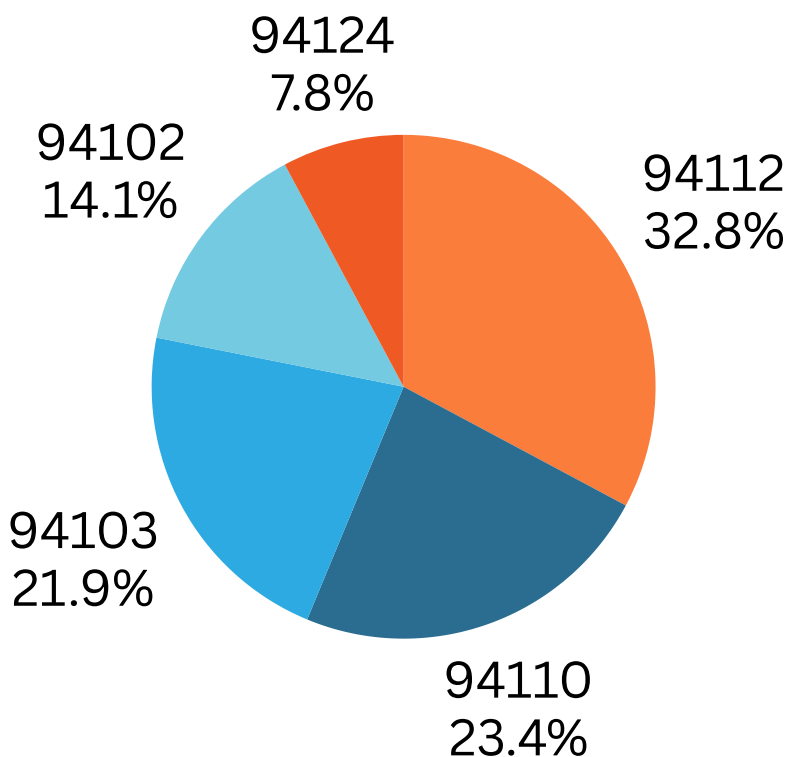
# Participant Demographics:

We engaged 125 participants across several San Francisco neighborhoods, with a significant concentration in the Mission, Bayview, and Excelsior Districts. Most participants were Spanish-speaking, with many identifying as students, young professionals, day laborers, domestic workers, and street vendors. Ages ranged from 16 to 78, reflecting a diverse intergenerational representation. The most represented age group was 26–35 year old, followed by 16–25 year old. Approximately 55% of participants identified as female, 43% as male, and about 2% as transgender or gender non-conforming. This diversity provided a rich foundation for understanding communities' unique wellness needs and experiences.



# Outreach Strategy:

We leveraged our member organizations and partners to maximize our footprint and engage with community members living across San Francisco. The top five zip codes represented were **94110 (Mission District and Bernal Heights)**, **94112 (Excelsior, Ingleside, and Outer Mission)**, **94103 (South of Market)**, **94102 (Tenderloin and Hayes Valley)**, and **94124 (Bayview-Hunters Point)**. By focusing outreach efforts in these key neighborhoods, we were able to connect with diverse residents and ensure that their voices and experiences were reflected in our wellness initiative.



We wanted to meet members and community partners where they were receiving services. We visited the following members: Horizons Unlimited, Latino Task Force Mission Hub, Indígena Health & Wellness, OCEIA’s Community Ambassadors and DreamSF Fellows, Good Samaritan Family Resource Center, The Women’s Building, Nuevo Sol, and Instituto Familiar de la Raza. Their support was instrumental in facilitating access and trust within their respective communities.

# PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

Rooted in SFLPEC's values of dignity, equity, and cultural responsiveness, our approach to wellness centers the lived experience of Latino and immigrant communities. We see wellness as a foundation for all other systems—Workforce, Health, Place, and Community Safety—and understand that the community's ability to thrive depends on addressing both internal strengths and external barriers. The following findings emerged from our 2025 community wellness engagement process:

## Key Findings: Current Wellness Practices

Community members shared a range of personal wellness practices during the sessions. Many participants reported prioritizing **basic physical wellness** through sleep, walking, and dancing — activities that are accessible and familiar. Additionally, several respondents mentioned the use of **traditional medicine and natural remedies**, reflecting deep cultural roots and a strong sense of trust in ancestral knowledge.

However, structured wellness practices such as **yoga, therapy, and gym use** were mentioned far less frequently. Many participants cited **cost barriers, lack of culturally responsive services, and limited access** as key reasons why they do not engage with these more formal wellness options.

This data suggests that while community members are actively tending to their **physical** and **spiritual** wellness using accessible tools, there are significant gaps in support for other dimensions — particularly **emotional, intellectual, and occupational** wellness, which often rely on structured programs, professional support, or workplace benefits.



## Top Three Dimensions Most Engaged

**Physical** – Sleep, walking, dancing, home remedies.

**Spiritual** – Traditional healing, prayer, nature.

**Social** – Many reported staying connected through family, neighborhood events, or informal gatherings.

## Dimensions Least Engaged

**Occupational** – Few participants reported finding personal satisfaction or enrichment in their work.

**Intellectual** – Limited engagement in learning opportunities or creative outlets.

**Emotional** – Formal therapy or emotional processing tools were rarely mentioned, often due to stigma or lack of access.

## What This Tells Us:

The findings highlight how resilient and resourceful the community is when it comes to caring for their health using what's available. At the same time, the data reveals unmet needs in areas that require systemic investment — like emotional support services, career pathways, and access to creative or educational enrichment. The lack of structured wellness engagement underscores the importance of **investing in culturally relevant, accessible services** that bridge these gaps.

# Health and Wellness Perceptions

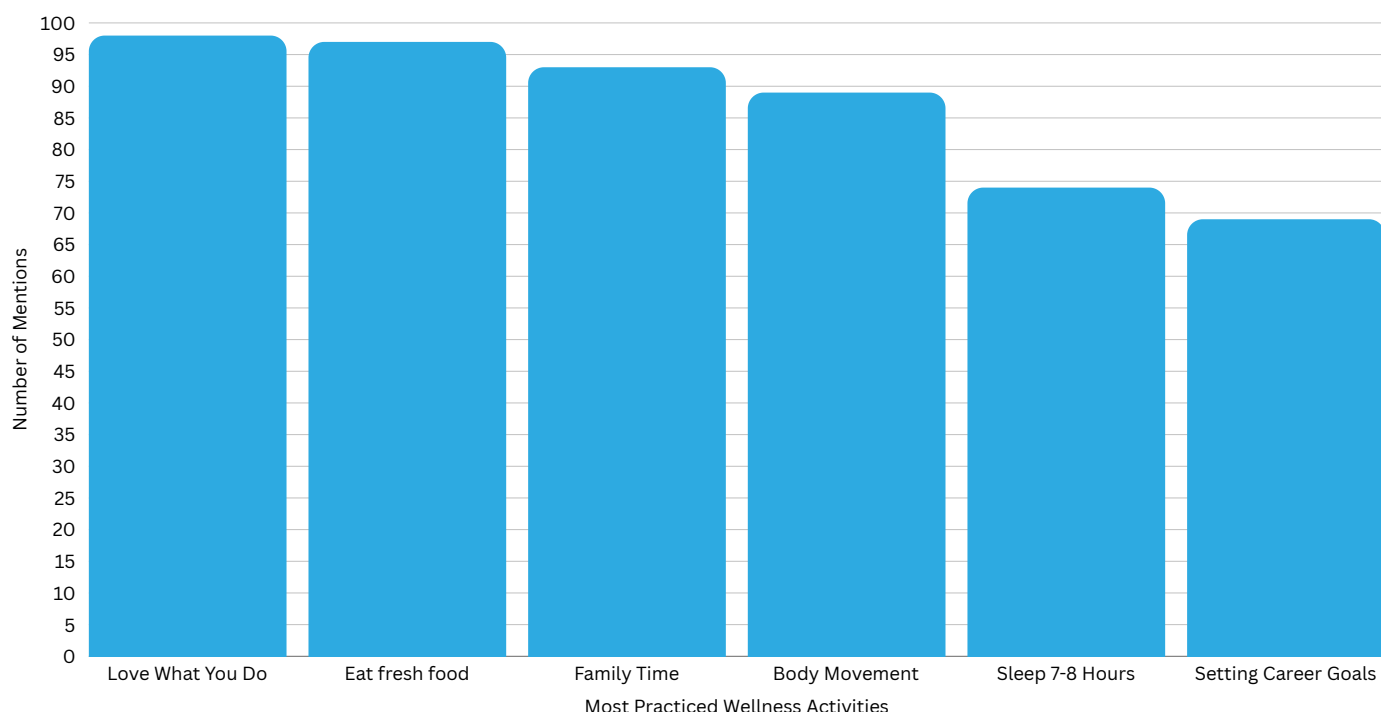
During the sessions, participants expressed a deeper and more nuanced understanding of wellness — not merely as the absence of illness, but as a **state of balance** rooted in mental peace, family wellness, spiritual grounding, and safe living conditions. Many emphasized that **emotional** and **social** stability were just as important as physical health.

Wellness was consistently described as something **collective** and **interconnected** — involving both the individual and their environment. Comments revealed that participants viewed wellness as a dynamic balance between the body, mind, spirit, and community.

Some participants were **surprised by dimensions** such as:

- **Intellectual wellness**, which they hadn't previously connected to their personal wellness.
- **Occupational wellness**, which raised reflections about job satisfaction, purpose, and dignity.
- **Environmental wellness**, which resonated strongly once explained, especially regarding housing quality and neighborhood safety.

These responses suggest that people already hold a **deep-rooted understanding of wellness**, even if they don't always use formal or academic language to describe it.



# **Top 5 Places Where People Access Wellness**

Participants consistently identified five key spaces as central to their wellness, highlighting the importance of both private and communal environments in supporting holistic wellness.

## **1. At Home**

The home was the most frequently mentioned space for wellness practices. Many participants described engaging in self-care through rest, sleep, prayer, cooking traditional meals, using herbal remedies, and spending quality time with family. The home environment acts as a refuge — especially vital for undocumented or low-income families who face significant stressors from outside environments. It provides a culturally familiar and emotionally safe space where individuals can recharge and nurture their physical, spiritual, and social wellness.

## **2. Religious Institutions**

Churches, temples, and spiritual centers serve as much more than places of worship. Participants shared that these spaces offer emotional support, a sense of belonging, healing, and community connection. For many, spirituality is deeply intertwined with wellness, making religious institutions essential hubs for mental and spiritual wellness.

## **3. Parks and Outdoor Spaces**

Public parks and green spaces, such as Dolores Park or neighborhood plazas, were valued for their role in mental clarity, physical exercise, and social connection. Community members expressed appreciation for nature as a calming, low-cost resource where they can walk, exercise, reflect, and feel safe. These spaces support physical, emotional, and social dimensions of wellness without financial barriers.

## **4. Community-Based Organizations**

Community centers and nonprofit organizations emerged as vital wellness spaces. They provide culturally relevant resources, social services, and educational programming that support mental, emotional, and physical health. Trusted staff and community leaders often create safe, welcoming environments—particularly important for immigrants, low-income families, and monolingual Spanish speakers who navigate systemic barriers.

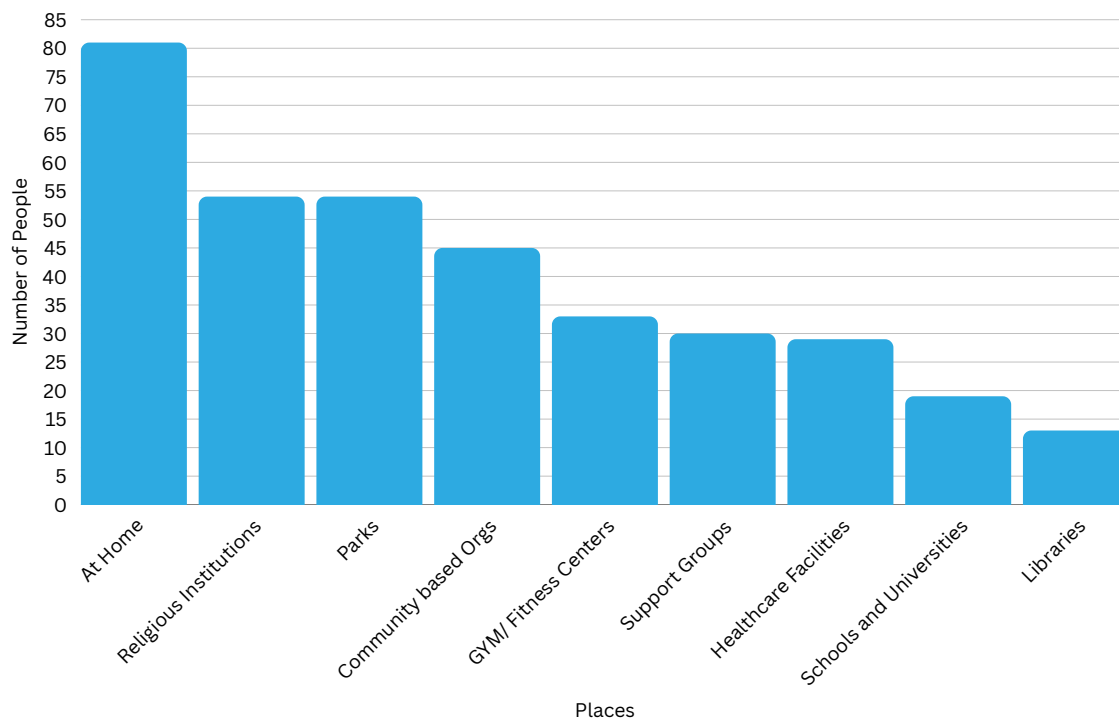
## **5. Fitness Centers**

Gyms, yoga studios, and dance spaces — especially those offering Zumba, aerobics, or culturally relevant classes — were noted as important wellness hubs. These places are valued not only for physical fitness but also for stress relief, discipline, and personal growth. Accessible, low-cost fitness programs are especially appreciated by working-class individuals seeking effective outlets to manage stress and improve health.

## Analysis

The prominence of these five spaces reveals how wellness is rooted in both **cultural familiarity** and **accessibility**. The home and religious institutions underscore the importance of trusted, familiar environments where cultural practices and spirituality nourish wellness. Parks and outdoor areas offer inclusive, cost-free spaces for physical and emotional restoration. Meanwhile, community organizations fill critical gaps by providing culturally relevant support tailored to specific needs of underserved populations. Finally, fitness centers, when accessible and culturally resonant, become vital outlets for holistic health.

Together, these places reflect a wellness ecosystem that blends **personal, social, cultural, and structural** elements — emphasizing that true wellness depends on accessible, trusted spaces that honor people’s lived experiences.



## Barriers to Accessing Wellness

Despite the resilience and resourcefulness demonstrated by community members, participants identified multiple **systemic and personal barriers** that hinder consistent engagement in wellness activities. These barriers impact access across physical, emotional, and social dimensions of health.

## Key Barriers Identified

- **Financial Constraints:** Many wellness services—such as therapy, gym memberships, or yoga classes—are unaffordable, particularly for undocumented and low-income families. The cost factor creates a significant obstacle to participation in structured wellness programs.
- **Time Poverty:** Long work hours, multiple jobs, and caregiving responsibilities leave little to no time for self-care or wellness activities, making it difficult for individuals to prioritize their health needs.
- **Language and Cultural Disconnect:** Wellness programs often lack Spanish or indigenous language options and fail to reflect the cultural values and traditional healing practices of Latino communities. This disconnect limits meaningful engagement.
- **Immigration-Related Stress:** Anxiety stemming from fear of deportation, trauma related to migration journeys, and family separation exacerbates mental health challenges and discourages the use of formal wellness services.
- **Digital Divide:** Limited access to reliable internet, computers, and digital literacy reduces awareness of available wellness programs and complicates the registration process.
- **Lack of Trust in Institutions:** Past experiences of discrimination and stigma, especially around mental health, foster skepticism and hesitancy in seeking formal help.
- **Transportation Barriers:** Inconsistent, unreliable, or costly public transportation restricts access to clinics, wellness centers, and community programs.
- **Internal Barriers:** Beyond external challenges, participants described struggles with motivation, mental health stigma, and feelings of isolation, which further complicate their ability to engage consistently with wellness practices.



## Mental Health Focus

Mental health emerged as a critical but often overlooked aspect of wellness. Fear, trauma, and stress related to immigration status and systemic inequities contribute to a significant emotional burden. Yet, access to culturally sensitive mental health care remains scarce, with stigma and distrust creating additional hurdles.

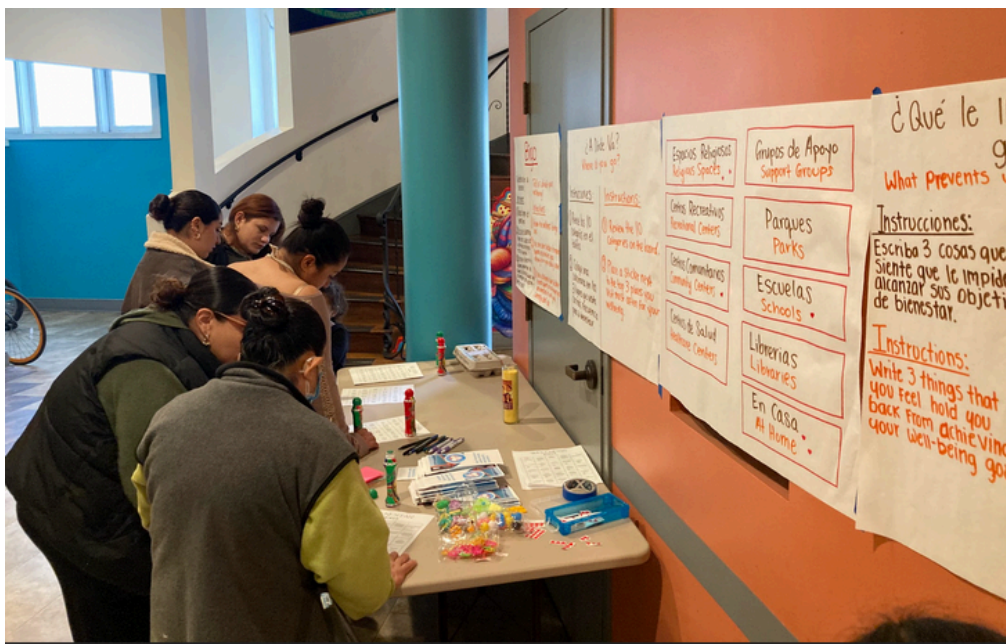
## Voices from the Community

Including testimonials helps ground these barriers in lived experience and humanizes the challenges:

*"Sometimes, after working two jobs, I'm just too tired to even think about exercise or therapy. The cost and time just aren't there."* — Participant

*"It's hard to find services in Spanish or that respect our traditions. I don't feel understood by many therapists."* — Participant

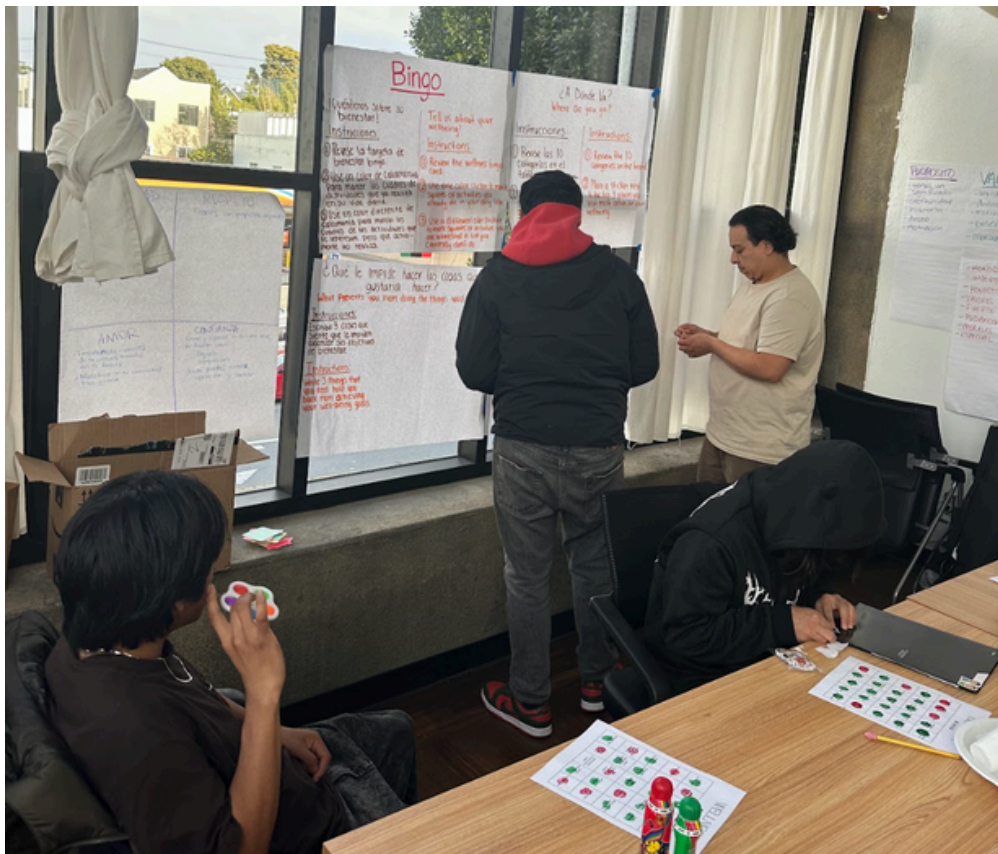
*"I'm scared to ask for help because I don't trust that they won't judge me or my family."* — Participant



## Barriers Identified

Participants consistently highlighted several key barriers that limit their ability to engage in wellness activities:

- Financial Constraints and Lack of Time: High costs and demanding work or caregiving schedules reduce opportunities for self-care.
- Limited Access to Affordable Wellness Programs: Many wellness services are unaffordable or unavailable in the community.
- Language and Cultural Barriers: A lack of Spanish and indigenous language options, and limited culturally relevant programming, hinder participation.
- Immigration-Related Stress: Fear, trauma, and anxiety related to immigration status impact mental health and access to services.
- Lack of Knowledge About Available Resources: Limited outreach and digital access make it difficult for community members to learn about or register for programs.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

It is important to note that **we did not formally solicit recommendations from community members** during the sessions. However, many participants organically shared ideas and suggestions based on their lived experiences and what they felt would support their wellness. have included recommendations informed by community feedback and best practices observed in similar contexts.

## Recommendations by Audience

### For City Government and Policy Makers

- Promote flexible wellness programs that accommodate the schedules of working families.
- Increase funding for immigrant-serving wellness programs to expand culturally relevant and language-accessible services.
- Ensure citywide access to mental health services regardless of immigration or legal status, to address barriers of fear and distrust.
- Support inclusive urban planning that prioritizes safe green spaces and neighborhood wellness hubs.
- Increase investment in workforce and leadership development programs to strengthen **occupational** wellness opportunities for immigrant communities.

### For Community-Based Organizations and Service Providers

- Provide Spanish-language outreach materials and culturally grounded wellness options such as traditional medicine and talking circles.
- Offer hybrid service models combining in-person and digital formats, accompanied by simple technology support.
- Provide childcare during service hours to reduce barriers for parents.
- Train frontline staff in trauma-informed care to enhance sensitivity and build stronger relationships.
- Embed wellness programming within trusted institutions such as churches, family centers, and other community partners to increase access.
- Create mobile wellness units and pop-up clinics in accessible neighborhood locations to bring services directly to the community.
- Develop skill-building programs, leadership workshops, and educational opportunities to address **occupational, intellectual, and emotional** wellness gaps.
- Partner with local employers to create mentorship and apprenticeship programs for immigrant workers.



# FELLOW'S PERSPECTIVE

These recommendations reflect both the direct voices of community members and insights drawn from the broader field of immigrant wellness and public health. They emphasize the need for **holistic, accessible, culturally relevant, and trauma-informed approaches** that recognize the complex realities faced by immigrant and low-income families.

Many recommendations are designed to **reduce structural barriers** such as cost, language, and transportation, while others address **internal barriers** by building trust and fostering culturally familiar environments. The blend of immediate practical actions (like mobile clinics and flexible hours) with longer-term policy and research goals creates a roadmap for sustainable improvements.

By clearly classifying recommendations for city officials, organizations, and aspirational future goals, this report aims to guide targeted action and foster collaboration across sectors.



# CONCLUSION

strength of San Francisco's Latino and immigrant communities as well as the significant systemic barriers they face in accessing holistic wellness. Through this participatory process, community members demonstrated deep knowledge and awareness of their wellness needs—emphasizing culturally rooted practices, mental health, and safe, trusted spaces as essential components of health.

These findings emphasize that barriers to wellness are deeply intertwined with structural inequalities and personal experiences. Addressing both external and internal obstacles—particularly those impacting mental health—requires comprehensive, culturally grounded approaches that build trust, expand access, and offer flexible, community-centered solutions.

This project reaffirms that the community itself holds the expertise and vision needed to guide effective wellness initiatives. What they need is meaningful support, resources, and responsive systems that recognize their lived realities, honor their cultural identities, and reduce structural obstacles.

Moving forward, SFLPEC is dedicated to centering community voices in all efforts to design and implement wellness programs and policies. By leveraging this data, we will advocate for equitable services that are accessible, culturally relevant, and trauma-informed. Collaboration with city officials, grassroots organizations, and community leaders will be essential to build a supportive network that uplifts and empowers.

By amplifying community power and committing to sustained investment, we can collectively ensure that every member of our community not only survives but truly thrives—living with dignity, health, and hope.



# Acknowledgements

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## THANK YOU!