



# Traffic Safety Center

Setting New Directions in Traffic Safety

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## Latino Traffic Safety Project

**A multi-year effort aimed at California's fastest growing ethnic group studies traffic safety in rural and urban settings.**



Latinos experience disproportionate risks of dying or being injured in traffic accidents compared to non-Latino whites, and Latinos will be the majority population in California by 2040. These facts are much of the impetus behind the **Latino Traffic Safety Project**, a partnership formed in 2003 between the **Tomas Rivera Institute** (left), a leading Latino policy organization, and the UC Berkeley Traffic Safety Center.

Funded by the **California Office of Traffic Safety**, the project, which is ongoing, has identified injury trends and conducted forums and focus groups with representatives of rural and urban Latino constituencies in the Central Valley and Southern California. Researchers have used their responses to uncover key issues and challenges and devise and test potential preventive measures for use throughout the state.

The TSC issued a final report in conjunction with the Institute, "[Traffic Safety Among Latino Populations in California](#)," and they are proceeding to implement their findings and recommendations.

The goal of the project was a detailed assessment of the factors affecting Latino traffic safety, including:

- injury trends and demographic data,
- best practices, and
- recommendations that can serve as a prototype for policy, enforcement, and program development.

A three-phase approach was taken:

- identifying the issues,
- testing the findings in focus groups in Latino communities, and

- testing specific intervention projects in target communities with measurement of results.

## Analyzing the Data to Uncover Latinos' Unique Risks

To develop an initial picture of Latino traffic safety in the state, TSC researchers combined **census** information with the **Statewide Integrated Traffic Records System** (SWITRS), a database of statistics about crashes in California. Researchers found that overall injury and mortality rates from traffic crashes are 10 percent higher than average for Latinos. In the case of passenger and pedestrian fatalities, their rates are 80 percent higher. Motor vehicle crashes are the third leading cause of death for California Latinos of all ages, and the leading cause of death for California Latinos up to the age of 24—higher than for any other ethnicity. For Latinos aged 25-44, dying from motor vehicle accidents is the second leading cause of death behind homicide.

Moreover, TSC researchers found that some demographic sub-groups of the Latino population, young males, for example, have disproportionate risk factors compared to their non-Latino white counterparts. In general, seat belt usage lags, along with child safety seat and bicycle helmet use. A 1998 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration study of Latinos across the country found that Mexican-American men reported the highest rate of heavy, problem drinking of 11 groups polled.

## Conversations with Rural and Urban Communities

With that information, the TSC and the Tomas Rivera Policy Institute arranged two workshops in Latino communities in **Huron, CA**, in the Central Valley, and in **East Los Angeles** in spring 2004. They were selected in part because of their contrasting settings and demographics, with Huron encompassing rural residents and East Los Angeles more urban ones.

Approximately 20 people attended each meeting and answered questions developed by Tomas Rivera and TSC researchers to shed light on persistent issues in the community. Participants expressed concerns over:

- **licensing laws**, especially for undocumented immigrants who could benefit from more formal driver training;
- the expense of **insurance** and difficulty in obtaining;
- **environmental factors** like machismo culture and customs in rural locations that seem to encourage drinking and driving; and
- the current system of **transportation for agricultural workers**, in multi-passenger

vehicles that can lack seat belts and whose drivers can be exhausted and unlicensed.

### **How Best to Get the Message Across**

Armed with that information, the research team made policy recommendations and then conducted three more focus groups in urban, suburban, and rural areas throughout the state in the spring and summer of 2005. Respondents from the meetings addressed how to best educate people in their communities and perform outreach. Participants suggested **raising awareness of the danger of drinking and driving** through public service announcements on television and at sports events. The ads should feature real-life stories and social gatherings like weddings and quincineras, with the focus being on the family rather than the individual, focus group members said.

In addition to writing the final report (see sidebar), Traffic Safety Center researchers are using the feedback from the focus groups to help guide the design of several interventions, which they plan to implement in 2006 and 2007 and subsequently measure their effectiveness.

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