

# Cultural Fact Sheet

## LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

### Background

- Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) is a cultural diversity continent comprising 33 different nations.
- The term LAC covers an extensive region, extending from The Bahamas and Mexico to Argentina and Chile.
- Latin American population is estimated at 650 billion people by 2020.
- The indigenous population is of 42 billion and the largest indigenous populations are in Mexico, Guatemala, Peru and Bolivia.
- Afro-Latinos population is estimated at 150 million

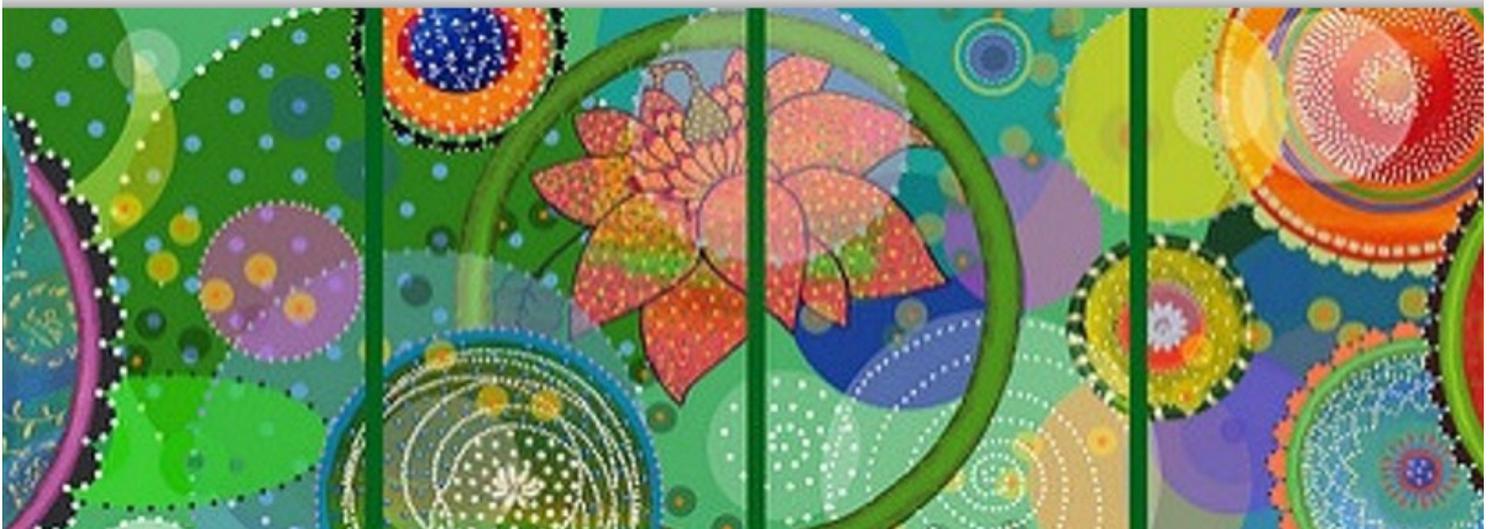


### Cultural Heritage

The people of Latin America are descendants of three main racial groups

- Indigenous or Amerindian
- African
- European

- Latin Americans are referred to and/or self-referred as Latinos, Hispanic or Latinx.



# LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

## Migration

There were two major waves of Latin American immigration in Australia in the early days

- 1970s Through the humanitarian program people arrived as refugees fleeing torture and persecution for political reasons
- 1980s – Ongoing political & financial instability in Latin America particularly from El Salvador & Central America.
- Many arrived as political refugees
- Many went through torture and trauma due to political conflicts in their country.
- Most Latin American countries were in some periods ruled by military dictatorship.
- Many people lost the loved ones under the power of the dictatorships, guerrillas and civil wars and some still cannot find family and friends who disappeared.



## Language & Communication

- Spanish is the main language across Latin America but in Brazil (Portuguese)
- Pronunciation varies from country to country and from region to region
- According to The World Bank's 2015 study, there are about 560 Indigenous languages spoken in the region today, reminding of about over 2000 spoken before pre-colonization times.
- Physical distance tends to be less than in Western cultures.
- Closer physical contact and touch is acceptable.
- Friends can kiss, hug, shake hands or pat each other on the back.
- A high level of emotional expression is acceptable.
- Direct eye contact might be viewed as disrespectful. Latinos might tend to look away or down as a sign of respect to the person speaking, especially if talking with someone older than themselves or the person is in a position of authority as health care professionals.
- Latinos tend to use gestures and express emotions when talking.



# LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

## Greetings

- Latinos are generally warm but formal in the way they address people, as respect is highly valued.
- In Latin America, generally, one air kiss on the cheek, a hug, eye contact and a warm smile are appropriate to almost all settings, professionally and personally, in greetings and farewells.
- On initial contact, a shake of hands and a warm smile will work well if feeling uncomfortable to kiss and hug.

## Manners & Customs

- Making a good impression is very important to Latinos. Looking good give them a sense of honour, dignity, and pride.
- Stylish, formal and conservative attire is commonly worn to all occasions, such as going to church, parties, social gatherings, and even to work.
- Punctuality might not be as rigid for Latinos as for some Australians. In Latin America, it is normal to be at least 30 minutes late for social gatherings and even for work commitments.
- Hats and sunglasses should not be used indoors.
- Shoes are normally worn indoor and walking barefoot inside the house is considered inappropriate. Walking barefoot on the street is not acceptable.

## Cultural Taboos

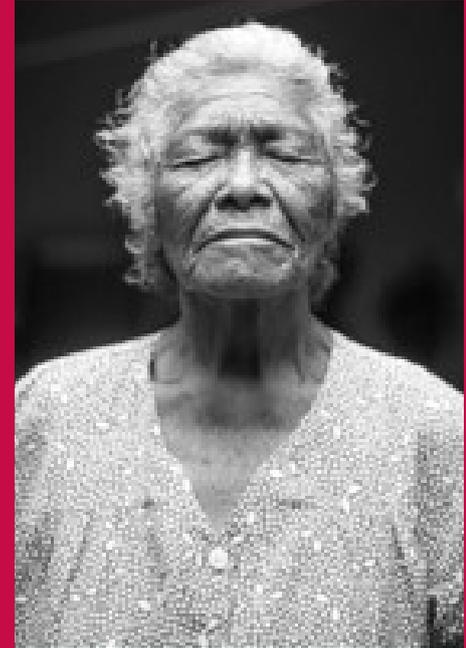
- Avoid talking about a subject related to sex because it is considered offensive to some people's religious background or beliefs.
- Abortion continues to be a taboo for many conservatives.
- Avoid joking about drugs.
- It is considered an insult to call the natives "Indio" (Indian).
- Homosexuality continues to be taboo.



# LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

## Religion

- The Roman Catholic Church now has a Latin American pope for the first time in its history.
- 84% of the Latin American population is Catholic. Other religions practiced are Protestant, Baptists, Seventh-day Adventists, Methodists, Lutherans and Presbyterian
- Many Latinos believe that God is an active force in everyday life and praying is an important part of their life.
- Latinos tend to display a religious object/picture of a saint in their home, and attend a religious service at least once a month
- Faith and church are often central to family and community life.
- All Latin American countries have declared themselves as laic states, which guarantees freedom of religion.



## Family Values

- Having a close relationship with significant others is the most important goal in life for most Latinos.
- Family is the primary unit in Latin American Culture and extended families are included as part of the nuclear family.
- The elderly tend to live with and be taken care of by the nuclear or extended family.
- Family members generally accompany patients to doctors' appointments.



## Food & Drink

- Most Latinos eat breakfast and drink black short coffee.
- La siesta, which is a rest period taken after lunch, is known to be a common practice among adult Latinos.
- In the early evening, la merienda, a light snack of coffee and rolls or sandwiches, is served
- In the evening, often as late as 9:00 p.m., la cena, a small supper, concludes the day's meals. Midday and evening meals are important family or social events.
- The meal may be followed by the sobremesa, a time to linger and talk over coffee or perhaps an after-dinner drink
- For Latin Americans, meal time is about connecting as well as eating.

LATIN AMERICA &  
THE CARIBBEANAttitudes to illness, death  
and dying

- Latinos tend to give a spiritual explanation to their illnesses.
- Many see illness as God's will or divine punishment for previous or current sinful behaviours.
- It is common for many Latinos to pray to various saints to help cure different illnesses.
- Physicians often do not disclose bad news or poor prognosis with their patients and are expected to keep up the patients' hope.
- Fatalism is a belief in fate—that one's future is preordained or not under one's control may deter Latinos from telling the truth.
- Latinos expect physicians to take a more directive role with regard to decisions regarding life-sustaining treatment.
- Clinicians should be prepared for large families to be present at the bedside and to be involved in care.



## Palliative Care

- Latinos are less likely to have a living will, medical durable power of attorney (MDPOA), or a Do Not Resuscitate (DNR).
- End of life care and advance care planning decisions are generally done by the participation of the family and extended family.
- Patients tend to prefer to take a more passive stand and prefer to share the decisions-making with their families and their physicians.
- As families might withhold information from the patients it may lead to late referrals to palliative care services



## CONTACTING US

### Compliments or complaints

- Whether you wish to make a suggestion, comment or a complaint, you can contact the MAS Team Leader:
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