

CienciaPR launches mental health videos in sign language ^[1]

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Captura de pantalla de el video en lengua de señas "Padecer una condición de salud mental no es una debilidad".

San Juan, PR — The deaf community is one of the most vulnerable and invisibilized communities in Puerto Rico, and its challenges have become even more acute during the pandemic due to lack

of services, barriers to communication and access to information, among others. For that reason, and as part of Mental Health Awareness Month (October), the nonprofit organization Ciencia Puerto Rico (CienciaPR) launched a series of videos on mental health issues in sign language.

The videos are part of the public service educational campaign 'Salud mental es plenitud' (Mental health is plenitude) of the Aquí Nos Cuidamos Toolkit, which seeks to help people take care of their mental and emotional health through practical, science-based tools that are relevant to their reality. The campaign consists of free multimedia resources such as videos, audios, infographics, educational guides and content for social media that are easy to use and share. The campaign was created with the input and support of the Puerto Rico Psychology Association and the Puerto Rican Association of Professional Counseling.

In particular, the sign language videos cover topics like stress, the importance of healthy management of emotions, anxiety and depression, and suicide prevention, among others. The videos and all the content of 'Salud mental es plenitud' can be accessed and downloaded for free through the portal aquinoscuidamos.org/saludmenta [3].

"The experiences of hearing and deaf people are different. Deaf people learn in a different way, more visually, as this allows them to move through the world without greater conflict," said Aslín Díaz Estrada, president of the organization "Escucha mis manos y Mis manos que obran" and community ambassador for Aquí Nos Cuidamos, who is also deaf. "Deaf people have raised their "voice" and are taking an active role in ensuring that deaf knowledge is recognized and integrated (in education)," added Díaz Estrada, who also is an interpreter in one of the videos [4]. The other sign-language interpreters are Sara Camilo, Evelyn Medina and Emil Melenciano.

"Throughout the course of the 'Aquí Nos Cuidamos' project, we have worked closely with the deaf community in Puerto Rico to understand their needs and priorities and to ensure that our initiatives are truly inclusive and accessible to these individuals," emphasized Dr. Mónica Feliú Mójer, director of communications for CienciaPR and Aquí Nos Cuidamos. "Although there are few studies on deaf mental health, those that do exist suggest that deaf people are at higher risk for mental health disorders such as depression and anxiety. The challenges of accessing information and services that deaf people face on a daily basis impact their quality of life and contribute to their vulnerability. That is why in addition to including sign language interpreters in all of our Aquí Nos Cuidamos videos and forums, we have created this series of sign language videos to promote mental health care among the deaf," said Feliú Mójer.

It should be noted that the Census Bureau estimated that in 2017 in Puerto Rico there was a population of over 151,000 deaf people, although studies have established a steep increase in people diagnosed with hearing loss. While the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS), a scientific and representative survey of adults in Puerto Rico conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimated that in 2019, 7.3% of the population over the age of 18 in Puerto Rico was deaf or severely hard of hearing. However, according to the Puerto Rico Institute of Statistics the country does not have clear data on its deaf population which adds to the challenges the community faces.

"Deaf people continue to lack the most basic things: equal access to education, lack of health services with a sign language interpreter, equal access to information, to employment opportunities... and the list goes on and on," said Evelyn Medina Bonilla, sign language interpreter and Aquí Nos Cuidamos collaborator. "For me, the nonprofit organization Ciencia Puerto Rico with its Aquí Nos Cuidamos initiative has set an example of how true inclusion can be achieved. Now it is up to all of us to ensure that this is the rule, not the exception," she added.

The sign language videos and all the content of 'Salud mental es plenitud' from the Aquí Nos Cuidamos Toolkit are available for free download at aquinoscuidamos.org/saludmental [3]. For more information about Aquí Nos Cuidamos, visit www.aquinoscuidamos.org [5] or www.cienciapr.org [6]. You can also follow CienciaPR on Facebook and Twitter as @CienciaPR and on Instagram as @ciencia.pr and find or share the content of the Aquí Nos Cuidamos Collection using the hashtag #AquiNosCuidamosPR.

Tags:

- [salud mental](#) [7]
- [Aquí Nos Cuidamos](#) [8]
- [lengua de señas](#) [9]

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Links

[1] <https://www.cienciapr.org/en/blogs/equipo-informa/cienciapr-launches-mental-health-videos-sign-language>
[2] <https://www.cienciapr.org/en/user/moefeliu> [3] <http://www.aquinoscuidamos.org/saludmental> [4]
<https://www.aquinoscuidamos.org/2021/09/29/trastorno-debilidad-senas/> [5] <http://www.aquinoscuidamos.org>
[6] <http://www.cienciapr.org> [7] <https://www.cienciapr.org/en/tags/salud-mental> [8]
<https://www.cienciapr.org/en/tags/aqui-nos-cuidamos> [9] <https://www.cienciapr.org/en/tags/lengua-de-senas>