

[Colorlines: Can Cell Phones Improve Latinas' Health?](#)

<http://newamericamedia.org/2014/03/can-cell-phones-improve-latinas-health.php>

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“Instead of junk food, choose a healthy meal from your country. Eat cactus, chia seed or verdolagas to take advantage of all their benefits.”

“Nobody wants to get involved in problems, but if a friend’s husband hits her, tell her there is a way out. Give her the Marjaree Mason Center number, 559-237-4706.”

Every few days, text messages like these pop up on the phones of more than 1,000 women in Fresno County, in California’s Central Valley. The messages come in Spanish, alternately offering referrals for affordable healthcare and domestic violence services, legal tips and affirmations. Any resource offered via text has been vetted by a team of women behind the project, called Únete Latina, to confirm that providers there speak Spanish and won’t ask for a Social Security number.

Those are the conditions Latina immigrant women in Fresno need in order to feel safe taking care of their own and family members’ health, according to Alejandra Olguin. Since late last year, Olguin has led the project as a staffer at Youth Tech Health (YTH), an Oakland, Calif.-based organization that uses technology to educate young people about health. Long before setting up Únete Latina’s text blasts and mobile website, YTH showed up at free legal clinics where people learned how to apply for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) and surveyed hundreds of women there as they waited for counsel related to immigration questions. The results pointed to the barriers of isolation and intimidation the project’s organizers would have to overcome.

“Immigrant women experience a palpable fear every single day,” Olguin told me via email from Oaxaca, Mex. “Whether it’s driving their children to school without a license or being asked for their Social Security number at a clinic, there’s fear about being involved in anything that seems ‘official,’ including our text messaging program.” Immigrants comprise nearly a quarter of Fresno’s population and two-thirds of those born outside the U.S. have come there from Mexico, drawn in part by agricultural jobs in this largely rural county. Nearly 40 percent of Latino immigrant adults in the county are undocumented. *Read more [here](#).*