HIV/AIDS and Latinos in the Deep South

December 10, 2008 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

"Shaping the New Response: HIVAIDS and Latinos in the Deep South"—a new report from the Latino Commission on AIDS (LCOA)—documents the disproportionately high rates of HIV/AIDS among Latino people in the region.

The report is a result of the LCOA Deep South Project, a two-year program with more than 300 interviews and eight forums in the Deep South, including Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. These states were defined as the Deep South by the Ford Foundation, which funded the study.

More than 2 million Latino people live in these states, which have seen a more than 400 percent increase in that demographic since the 1990 census. Latino people have lower HIV/AIDS rates than African-American people in the Deep South, but Latino people have higher rates than white people in the region.

In the Deep South in 2006, Latino people were two to three times more likely than white people to be living with HIV/AIDS and three to 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with AIDS.

Tim Frasca, the report's lead author, said the reasons include "a lack of culturally and linguistically competent prevention and health-care resources, distrust and lack of access to prevention and care providers given the anti-immigrant social and legal restrictions imposed by most states in the region, a well-organized commercial sex industry and a complete lack of programs for Spanish-speaking men who have sex with men."

Recommendations from the forums included: improving knowledge of Latino cultures in general and of immigrant Latino families in particular; exploring partnerships with worksites and employers; recruiting Latino and bilingual volunteers; and adjusting clinic hours to accommodate people who work long hours and have no paid sick leave.

LCOA had additional recommendations, which included: increasing cooperation among local public and private entities; sharing resources and data; encouraging the local Spanish-language media to promote health and HIV prevention messages; training the local Spanish-speaking faith-based communities on health promotion and HIV prevention strategies; and increasing the amount of Latino advocates in each state.

To download the report, click here.

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