Prevention Awareness at United States Conference on AIDS

September 19, 2008

The United States Conference on AIDS (USCA)—the largest gathering of HIV/AIDS experts in the country—takes place September 18–21 in Fort Lauderdale, prompting South Florida health advocates to showcase ways in which they are crossing language and cultural barriers to spread HIV awareness among minority communities, the *South Florida Sun-Sentinel* reports.

According to the state's department of health, about 30 percent of people living with HIV/AIDS in Palm Beach and Broward County were born outside of the United States, many of whom have little understanding of how HIV is transmitted or treated.

"People will listen to you more if you tell them exactly what's out there in their language," said Vela Pierre Massenat, an HIV outreach coordinator with Palm Beach County's Comprehensive AIDS Program. Dubbed the "condom lady," she takes her prevention message—and bags of condoms—to Laundromats, convenience stores and barbershops to talk about HIV with the county's growing number of Caribbean Americans.

In addition to helping educate the Caribbean community, HIV advocates are also tailoring their prevention efforts to Latinos and African Americans.

"A lot of young brothers come in and talk with their barbers and get advice," said Vernon McWhite, who often takes advantage of the free condoms available at Fort Lauderdale's Neighborhood Unisex Salon. "You know, the barbershop is the black man's country club. With the high rate of HIV in the black community, it's a good message to send: safe sex is the best sex."

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