



THE AIDS INSTITUTE

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News Service of The AIDS Institute

National Latino Conference Underscores High HIV/AIDS Rates Among Latinos

July 25, 2006 – Miami, FL: Speakers addressing a national conference on Latinos and AIDS in Miami, Florida this week decried the disproportionately high rates of HIV/AIDS among Latinos in the United States, and said more needs to be done to combat an epidemic that is devastating Latino communities.

“In America, the culture promises an American dream – life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness,” said Frank Oldham, Jr. Executive Director of the National Association of people with AIDS (NAPWA) who spoke during the first day of the *2006 National Conference on Latinos and AIDS* on Tuesday morning, July 24th. In America, Oldham said, there is the possibility of “picking yourself up by your own bootstraps.” “But something as small as a virus alters our understanding of these truths,”

The two day conference on Latinos and AIDS, which took place on July 24 and 25, was attended by approximately 300 people and covered several issues from a Latino perspective, addressing the epidemiology of HIV in the Latino community, for example, and the link between HIV and drug use in the Latino community. Many speakers emphasized the disproportionately high rates of HIV/AIDS among Latinos and minorities in general, saying the current trends and statistics are unacceptable.

Latinos comprise 14 % of the US population but account for 19 % of all AIDS cases reported through 2004. In 2004, the AIDS rate among Latinos was more than three times the rate among non Hispanic white men, and the AIDS rate among Latinas was more than five times the rate of non Latina whites.

In 1985, racial and ethnic minorities accounted for 45 % of all AIDS cases diagnosed in the United States, but by 2004, that number had jumped to 71 %, a 25 % increase. “That is shameful, that should not have happened,” said Dr. Antonio Estrada, Director of Mexican American Studies at the University of Arizona in Tucson, Arizona. “If we had been doing our jobs right, perhaps, it wouldn’t have. More importantly, if the government had funded us at the right level, this would not have happened.”

Dr. Gene Copello, Executive Director of The AIDS Institute, said: “This meeting is reminding us once again that HIV is a disproportionate and growing concern among Latinos. Access to culturally competent and culturally specific HIV prevention, treatment, and care programs are needed to serve this population. Access to quality services and programs is the key to addressing HIV/AIDS in this and all groups impacted by the epidemic.”

Television actor Eric Estrada, star of the hit television series *Chips* in the 1970s and honorary chairman of the conference, told the conference attendees that he was appearing before them as a “concerned parent,” not as an actor. He urged other Latinos to “take ownership of our health as a community by teaching our children about HIV.” “We are at war – it is war time and we have to declare war on HIV and AIDS,” said Estrada.

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For more information and to become involved in AIDS advocacy, please contact The AIDS Institute at: (202) 835-8373, or by email at: Info@theaidsinstitute.org or www.TheAIDSInstitute.org

The AIDS Institute is a national nonprofit agency that promotes action for social change through public policy research, advocacy and education.

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