

NEWS RELEASE

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FIRST NATIONAL NATIVE HIV/AIDS AWARENESS DAY OBSERVED MARCH 21ST

Native Communities Nationwide Hold Events to Raise Awareness

March 21st marks the very first annual observance of National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NNHAAD), targeting American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiians. This national mobilization effort is designed to encourage Native people across the United States and Territorial Areas to get educated, get tested, get involved in prevention and get treated for HIV/AIDS. Special events such as free HIV/AIDS testing, talking circles, Pow Wows, Walks, town hall meetings and memorial services will be held throughout the country. Unfortunately, in Native communities, HIV and AIDS continue to rise. Though American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians represent approximately 1.2 percent of the U.S. population, they suffer higher rates of health disparities, including HIV/AIDS. Alaska Natives and American Indians (AI/AN) had the 3rd highest rate (above Caucasians) of AIDS diagnoses in 2004, despite having the smallest population. Statistics show that American Indians have been disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS since the epidemic's beginning some 25 years ago.

The National Native Capacity Building Assistance (CBA) Network (National Native American AIDS Prevention Center [NNAAPC], Center for Applied Studies in American Ethnicity [CASAE], and Inter Tribal Council of Arizona [ITCA]) surveyed American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians throughout the United States in an effort to determine what day would be the most appropriate day for National Native Awareness Day. **March 21st, the first day of spring (spring equinox) was the date chosen!** The four seasons are highly respected in many cultures because they closely represent the cycle of life. Spring represents a time of equality and balance. It is the only day when day and night are at equal lengths. It is a time of profound change, new beginnings and birth. In support of NNHAAD the Native CBA Network presented a resolution SAC-06-002 to the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) October 2006 session. The resolution was approved for support of the National American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, March 21, 2007.

Especially exciting is the introduction of a Pendleton blanket designed by the network to mark this special day. The blanket design is comprised of designs from the cultural elements of American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians. For purchase information you may contact CASAE at 800-642-0273, ITCA at 602-307-1534 and/or NNAAPC at 510- 444-2051. You will also find information on the websites listed below.

Because NNHAAD is a nationwide effort, organizers are making a "Call to Action" for Natives across the US to honor this day in an effort to ensure that Native communities realize that the epidemic is not slowing; but increasing in certain parts of the country. This rise is linked to the rise in methamphetamine use, an issue of great concern to Native people. NNHAAD encourages Native celebrities and community leaders lend their name, voices and time to serve as spokespeople for this important day.

NNHAAD is being directed, planned and coordinated by the National Native Capacity Building Assistance Network and supported by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. For more information on products such as posters, buttons, save the date cards, and/or the Pendleton blanket designed to honor the first **National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day 2007**, please visit the websites of the Native CBA Network: CASAE; <http://www.happ.colostate.edu>, ITCA; www.itcaonline.com, and NNAAPC; www.nnaapc.org.

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