

PRESS RELEASE

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For Immediate Release

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THE 5TH ANNUAL NATIONAL NATIVE HIV/AIDS AWARENESS DAY: NATIVE COMMUNITIES CALL FOR ACTION TO ADDRESS THE IMPACT OF HIV

March 20, 2011 is the 5th annual National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, an opportunity for communities, health providers and government agencies to raise awareness about the impact of HIV in American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian communities. On this day, diverse Native people across the US and Pacific—so often ignored in the larger US landscape—call for standardized HIV data reporting and more culturally competent HIV service providers to address the epidemic in Native communities.

With the recommendations outlined in the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS), the US is poised to address the HIV epidemic in the communities deemed hardest hit. While this is a great step forward for public health, the strategy fails to address Native communities and emerging populations affected by HIV. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders (NHOPI) and American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/AN) have **the third and fourth highest rates of new HIV infections** respectively, despite their relatively small populations. This represents an enormous disparity, made even more alarming by the fact that flawed HIV surveillance and data collection methods often disguise the full impact of the disease in these communities.

Accurate and illustrative data is extremely difficult to obtain for all Native populations. For American Indians and Alaska Natives, reporting sources are varied due to sovereignty issues and misclassification, resulting in no reporting or at best, underreporting. The impact of the disease is similarly obscured for Native Hawaiians, who are alternately classified as “Pacific Islander,” “Asian/Pacific Islander,” “Asian” or simply “Other.” There is no standard for ethnic classification utilized by all 50 states and the 6 US-affiliated Pacific Island Jurisdictions. As a result, HIV incidence in Native communities is likely higher than current estimations.

There are over 562 federally recognized American Indian tribes and 229 Alaskan Native tribes. Native Hawaiian communities exist not just in Hawaii and the Pacific Island Jurisdictions, but also across the continental US. Many tribes are located in rural areas, while other communities are separated by the vast Pacific Ocean, making it difficult to access HIV prevention, testing and treatment services. The linguistic and cultural diversity of these tribes and communities presents additional challenges, apparent in the lack of success of “one-size-fits-all” prevention models. Without culturally appropriate services and health care providers prepared to serve the needs of these communities, HIV prevention efforts will fail.

“The statistics may not paint a clear picture of the HIV epidemic in Native communities,

but we know we are affected. March 20th is about our communities taking the lead to raise awareness,” says Stacy Bohlen, Executive Director of the National Indian Health Board. “We may be underserved and underrepresented, but we refuse to remain invisible. American Indians, Alaska Natives and Native Hawaiians live in every city, every state of the US. We’re part of your community and we invite you to join us in the fight.”

To find out more about National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, visit or contact the following organizations:

Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center

730 Polk Street, 4th Floor
San Francisco, CA 94109
(415) 292-3400
www.apiwellness.org

CA7AE: HIV/AIDS Prevention Project

357 Aylesworth Hall, SE
Fort Collins, CO 80523
(800) 642-0273
www.happ.colostate.edu

Great Plains Tribal Chairman’s Health Board

1770 Rand Road
Rapid City, SD 57702
(605) 72W1-1922
www.aatchb.org

Inter Tribal Council of Arizona (ITCA)

2214 North Central Avenue, Ste 100
Phoenix, AZ 85004
(602) 258-ITCA
www.itcaonline.com

National Native American AIDS Prevention Center (NNAAPC)

720 South Colorado Blvd., Ste 650-S
Denver, CO 80246
(720) 382-2244
www.nnaapc.org

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