

Shaping the New Response HIV/AIDS and Latinos in the Deep South

Written by Robert ID4555

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Report Released on Latinos In Deep South with High Rates of AIDS and HIV Diagnoses

On World AIDS Day December 1, 2008 the Latino Commission on AIDS released “Shaping the New Response: HIV/AIDS and Latinos in the Deep South” Report, documenting the extraordinarily high rates of HIV and AIDS diagnoses among Latinos, the apparent contributing factors to this health crisis and recommendations for future action in the Deep South (Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, South Carolina and North Carolina). Shaping the New Response reached its conclusions after two years of research including more than 300 interviews, 8 roundtables covering all 7 states, analysis of epidemiological data, and a review of relevant studies.

There are 2,052,227 Latinos in these seven states (as of 2007) which is an increase of 431% since the 1990 census. Latinos range from a high of 7.5% of the population in Georgia to 1.8% for Mississippi. But in rates of HIV and AIDS diagnosis Latinos present a startling portrait. While Latinos have far lower rates of HIV and AIDS diagnoses than that among Blacks in the region, Latinos have significantly higher rates than that among Whites in the Deep South. In 2006 Latinos were 2 to 3 times more likely to be living with HIV/AIDS and 3 to 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with AIDS than Whites in the Deep South.

Many public health professionals in the region are asking Latinos are presenting with such high levels of HIV/AIDS. The answers from the Commission’s research are relatively simple – 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,” said Tim Frasca, primary author of Shaping the New Response.

There are many professionals in health care institutions, community based organizations and State/County health departments that understand the difference between a public health crisis and the politics of the immigration debate. These local heroes are attempting to reverse these health outcomes while responding to an overwhelming health crisis among regional Black populations and there are elected officials who pretend that the problem does not exist. Most of the public health professionals we spoke to understood that the Latino HIV/AIDS epidemic can have extensive repercussions for each State and they have great ideas on how to stop it”, said Guillermo Chacon, Vice-President of the Latino Commission on AIDS.

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If we are to attack this health crisis like any other health emergency, public health needs the freedom and resources to do its job. We need a local infrastructure that will advocate and provide for increased services for Latinos at risk for and with this disease. Much basic research needs to be done on creative models for prevention and care for this very mobile population. No one should delude themselves into thinking that the variables that are producing this HIV/AIDS emergency are not also affecting other areas of critical health care for Latinos,” said Miriam Vega, PhD, Director of Research and Evaluation for the Commission.

The report contains a synthesis of recommendations from roundtables held in each state on Latinos and HIV/AIDS and additional recommendations from the Latino Commission on AIDS. The full copy of the Report is available at www.latinoaids.org . Printed copies of Shaping the New Response: HIV/AIDS and Latinos in the Deep South with illustrations can also be ordered at this website.