



# POLICY BRIEF

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## Latinos & HIV/AIDS

### Overview

Latino communities in California continue to be heavily impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. While advancements in medical treatment have improved the health outcomes of persons living with HIV, the steady growth in cases also means that a larger number of people require access to HIV drugs and medical care on an ongoing basis. As this number increases, additional pressure is placed on our health care delivery system. The flat level of Ryan White CARE ACT funding over the last several years has exacerbated this pressure. It is therefore imperative that policy makers and public health officials respond with aggressive and sustained measures to prevent new infections and mitigate the impact of HIV disease in Latino communities by filling the gaps in critical prevention services that have long been under-funded.

### Epidemiology

Latinos represented 39% of AIDS cases diagnosed in California in 2004. As of July 31, 2005, there were over 25,000 California Latinos living with HIV/AIDS. Recent studies show that the majority of Latinos diagnosed with HIV develop AIDS within one year of diagnosis. This means that the majority of Latinos are diagnosed approximately 8 to 10 years after acquiring HIV; it is likely that many have transmitted HIV unknowingly to others. Thus, late diagnosis of HIV among Latinos contributes to the spreading of the HIV epidemic in this population.

Young Hispanics are especially disproportionately affected: The percentage of cumulative AIDS cases in California for those under age 30 is greater for Hispanics compared to whites, for males 23.6% vs. 12.9% and for females 32.4% vs. 22.1%. Young people, in particular, are known to have multiple sexual partners and if they become infected with HIV may be much more likely to transmit the infection to others than older people who may have fewer sexual partners. Thus, early HIV detection in young people is of particular significance.

Among women, Latinas account for a growing share of reported HIV infections. In California, through July 31, 2005, Latinas represented 29% of reported HIV infections among women, second only to African-American women (37%).

## **Funding Trends**

In recent times, funding trends at the state and federal levels in HIV prevention have generally declined. State and federal HIV prevention programs by the State Office of AIDS decreased from \$54.8 million in fiscal year 2002-2003 to \$47.5 million in FY 2004-2005. While the FY 2005-2006 budget will increase to \$53.1 million, these allocations over the last three-year period are not keeping pace with the rate of new HIV infections. About 151,000 states residents were HIV positive in 2005, compared with 108,000 in 1998.

## **Gaps in Prevention Efforts**

California's portfolio of state-funded prevention efforts lacks an adequate number of culturally and linguistically appropriate social marketing interventions. With limited budgets, dollars are often prioritized for direct services. However, evidence from other social/health arenas tells us that social marketing media campaigns can be an effective (and ultimately cost-efficient) way of changing behavior. Switzerland's STOP AIDS Campaign, for instance, is considered among the most successful in the world. Created by a joint task force of the Swiss AIDS Foundation and the Swiss Federal Office for Public Health, STOP AIDS is the longest running HIV/AIDS prevention program in the world. It was launched in 1987 as a national, multi-media campaign designed to: (1) increase condom use among Switzerland's general population and targeted risk groups, (2) reduce discrimination against individuals with HIV/AIDS, (3) increase solidarity among those living with HIV/AIDS with the rest of the population. The campaign also promoted early HIV detection. Through an advertising strategy of persuasive, gradually phased in messages and mainstream imagery, and a system of constant evaluation, the program achieved successful results during the first few, critical years of its operation. The STOP AIDS campaign remains in place as Switzerland's primary AIDS prevention program, and is one of the hallmark examples of successful social marketing. (For more information, please visit: <http://www.social-marketing.org/success/cs-stopaids.html>)

## **Conclusion**

At a time when rates of HIV infection continue to increase (especially among Latino & minority communities) and amid continued budget deficits, it is imperative that leaders and their stakeholders work together to craft meaningful and cost-effective prevention interventions aimed at curbing the increasing number of new HIV infections.

### **About the Latino Coalition Against AIDS –**

The mission of the Latino Coalition Against AIDS is to shape and mobilize a unified community response to the AIDS epidemic in the Latino community. The coalition develops public and private partnerships to address key public policy issues associated with Latinos/as and AIDS in Los Angeles County and provides leaderships in the development of local, state and federal legislative responses.

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