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Setting the Stage for Latino Centered Events at AIDS 2012 International Conference

The Latino/Hispanic Research Forum: Critical Gaps in HIV Prevention Efforts for Latinos

July 24, 2012 (Washington, DC) – More than 250 Latino HIV/AIDS researchers, experts, and community leaders from the United States, Puerto Rico, Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean, and South America gathered this past Sunday in Washington, DC, for the *Latino/Hispanic HIV Community Research Forum: Creando Una Red Para Un Futuro Sin VIH/SIDA*.

Panel and roundtable discussions at the forum addressed critical gaps in HIV prevention efforts and highlighted unique factors and specific needs to address the HIV epidemic in Latino communities effectively. The full-day work session set the stage for Latino-centered events this week during the *XIX International AIDS Conference—AIDS 2012*—the world's largest HIV/AIDS convocation.

Dr. Miriam Y. Vega, Vice President of the Latino Commission on AIDS, served as Co-Chair of the Research Forum. Dr. Vega said the forum was an excellent opportunity to highlight HIV prevention and treatment needs of Latinos/Hispanics—a population that warrants significant attention, but too often receives inadequate prioritization in the public health response to combat the U.S. HIV epidemic.

While overall HIV incidence among Latinos has declined, the same has not been true for Latino young adults ages 20–24. Dr. Vega, together with other leading experts presenting at the forum, focused on the rise of HIV incidence and the urgent need for HIV prevention among Latino young adults. This includes young Latino MSM—men who have sex with men—who are disproportionately burdened by HIV infection.

The Latino/Hispanic HIV Community Research Forum also addressed issues concerning HIV prevalence among early adolescents. With Latinos representing the fastest-growing school-age population in the United States, HIV prevention among Latino youth has national significance in creating a future without HIV/AIDS.

According to Dr. Vincent Guilamo-Ramos, Co-Director of the Center for Latino Adolescent and Family Health at the New York University Silver School of Social Work, HIV rates tend to be low among teens, which often prevents this age group from being perceived as a public health priority. Young adolescents start more risk behaviors in their early teen years, making them vulnerable to HIV transmission. So, despite their low HIV rates, they should be a public health priority for prevention efforts.

The research forum allowed for sharing of resources, strategies, and best practices related to Latino-centered models in HIV prevention and education, with the expectation of building a collaborative research network focused on strengthening efforts to fight the HIV epidemic among the nation's growing Latino/Hispanic communities.

More information on the research forum is available at <http://nlaan.org/aids2012/>.

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