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Congressman Pastor promotes

HIV testing and education among Latinos

PHOENIX, Ariz. - U.S. Rep. Ed Pastor, D-Ariz., is calling on all Latinos to empower themselves with information on the fight against AIDS this month, which marked the Sixth Annual National Latino AIDS Awareness Day (NLAAD) on Oct. 15.

NLAAD promotes HIV testing and education among Latinos and mobilizes communities in the fight against AIDS. This year's theme - United We Can: HIV/AIDS Stops Here. Prevention Starts With Us - speaks to the critical role HIV testing and prevention education plays in stemming the spread of AIDS.

"AIDS is a pressing issue in our community because it continues to attack Latinos disproportionately," Pastor said. "I encourage Latinos and all individuals to put any stigmas and fears aside and please get tested for HIV as part of your routine health screenings."

A list of local organizations which provide free and confidential HIV testing is available at [www.nlaad.org](http://www.nlaad.org)

. You may click on the link under Find Testing Place. You also may phone 1-800-232-4636 for the information.

Statistics show the HIV/AIDS epidemic continues to take its toll on Latino/Hispanic communities in the United States. Latinos represented 15.3 percent of the U.S. population in 2006, but accounted for 24.3 percent of the new HIV infections, according to the Centers for Control and Prevention (CDC). On a national level, this epidemic is nothing short of a public health crisis; however, it is also important to remember that it is a local problem of grave importance. In Arizona, Hispanics make up approximately 20 percent of the HIV/AIDS cases, according to the Southwest Center for HIV/AIDS website.

Several factors such as discrimination, language barriers, acculturation, social stigma, poverty, immigration status fears and access to care act as obstacles to prevention efforts, deter testing and disproportionately contribute to the high level of HIV infection. Additionally, limited knowledge of the disease and the dissemination of misinformation throughout the Latino community make this year's efforts to combat HIV/AIDS even more important.

This national campaign reminds us to get educated, encourage Latinos to get tested for HIV and advocate for increased access to culturally and linguistically competent medical care for those living with HIV/AIDS, Pastor said.

National Latino AIDS Awareness Day was created in 2003 by the Latino Commission on AIDS and the Hispanic Federation in partnership with community-based organizations, people living with HIV/AIDS, health departments and others to educate, empower and enable the Latino community to confront AIDS.