



PRESS RELEASE

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MAY 19th SPOTLIGHTS ALARMING RISE IN HIV INFECTIONS AMONG ASIAN AND PACIFIC ISLANDER WOMEN

The Banyan Tree Project commemorates National A&PI HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

May 19th, 2011 marks the 7th annual National Asian & Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, a federally endorsed observance highlighting the alarming rise in new HIV infections among Asians and Pacific Islanders (A&PIs), an often overlooked population in mainstream HIV prevention efforts. On this day, the Banyan Tree Project—a national partnership to reduce the silence and shame around HIV in A&PI communities—calls on community leaders, health providers and policymakers to address the lack of HIV prevention information targeting A&PIs, and A&PI women in particular.

Recent analysis of data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reveals that A&PIs have the highest rate of increase in new HIV infections in the nation, the only statistically significant growth among any racial or ethnic group, and yet two-thirds of A&PIs have never been tested for HIV. While the disease is still seen as a men's issue, the rate of increase for A&PI women is actually higher than that of A&PI men. Still, the misconception that A&PIs are not at risk for HIV persists—even among healthcare providers who discourage A&PI women from getting tested. In fact, a recent study by Dr. Hyeouk Chris Hahm from Boston University indicates that A&PI women are less likely than other ethnic groups to be offered an HIV test in OB/GYN settings.

A number of factors contribute to the HIV risk for A&PI women, including a lack of targeted HIV prevention information for women, unequal power dynamics in sexual relationships, biological differences and the fact that a woman's HIV risk is often indirect. A woman's HIV risk is her partner's HIV risk and many women in monogamous relationships are shocked when they test positive. Contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of A&PI women living with HIV got it through heterosexual sex (86%).

“By 2050, A&PIs will represent about 11% of the US population,” says Lance Toma, executive director of A&PI Wellness Center, the lead organization for the Banyan Tree Project. “We could be facing a public health disaster if we fail to address the rise in HIV and STD infections in our communities now.”

On May 19th, the Banyan Tree Project supports A&PI communities across the nation and the 6 US-affiliated Pacific Island Jurisdictions as they host events designed to raise HIV awareness and promote testing. For 2011, there will be over 20 community events held in locations as geographically diverse as the Federated States of Micronesia and Springfield, Missouri. To find an event in your area, please visit www.banyantreeproject.org.

About the Banyan Tree Project

Funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, the Banyan Tree Project is a national partnership that seeks to engage people across the U.S. and Pacific Island Jurisdictions from all walks of life to reduce the shame and discrimination around HIV/AIDS in A&PI communities. Partners include Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center (project lead), Hawai'i Multicultural HIV/AIDS Resource Project of Life Foundation (Honolulu), Asian Pacific AIDS Intervention Team (Los Angeles), Massachusetts Asian & Pacific Islanders for Health (Boston) and Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum (San Francisco). For more information please visit www.banyantreeproject.org.

About Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center

Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center is a health services, education, research and policy organization dedicated to educating, supporting, empowering and advocating for Asian and Pacific Islander (A&PI) communities—

particularly A&PIs living with or at risk for HIV/AIDS. With staff fluent in 20 languages, A&PI Wellness Center delivers programs regionally, statewide, and nationally, and collaborates with community-based organizations throughout the Asia Pacific Region. For press materials or more information please visit www.apiwellness.org.

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