



Page 1 of 3

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## **The First National Asian & Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Awareness Day Takes Root in San Francisco**

A&PI Wellness Center launches national initiative to foster acceptance and reduce stigma  
in Asian & Pacific Islander communities

**San Francisco, CA** – Monday, May 9, 2005 – Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center (A&PI Wellness Center) has claimed May 19, 2005, as the first annual, **National Asian & Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Awareness Day**. To mark this historic day, which is officially recognized by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, the San Francisco-based A&PI Wellness Center will lead the nation with a special May 19<sup>th</sup> launch event, ***Family Trees: Rooted in Acceptance***, which will be held at The Forum, Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, 701 Mission St., San Francisco, from 5-6 p.m. Along with video presentations, panel discussions will feature A&PI celebrities and experts: Olympic gold medalist and AIDS activist **Greg Louganis**; CBS5/KPIX award-winning television news anchor **Sydney Kohara**; award-winning journalist and writer **Helen Zia**; San Francisco Human Rights Commissioner, the **Hon. Cecilia Chung**, together with her mother and grandfather; **Kristine Silva**, a mother and HIV educator who lost her son Derek early on in the epidemic; and **Dr. Steven Tierney**, Director of HIV Prevention, SF Dept. of Public Health. A&PI celebrities will also be present to lend their support – former NFL lineman **Esera Tuaolo**, actors **Alec Mapa** and **Amy Hill**; Captain **Ryan Okashima**, first Asian-American Commander of the California Highway Patrol; and **Heather Fong**, San Francisco Chief of Police. The event is free and open to the public and the media. Similar events will be held in six other cities across the U.S., including Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., Honolulu, New York and Boston.

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The A&PI population is one of the fastest growing in the U.S., which makes the need for public awareness even more urgent. Data from 1999, 2000 to 2003 indicates a 34 per cent increase in AIDS diagnoses among A&PIs in the U.S. In addition, a strongly entrenched cycle of cultural shame and stigma surrounding issues of disease, sexuality and acceptable behavior continues to thwart access to HIV prevention and care.

“The national awareness day is one lightning rod for the Banyan Tree Project,” said executive director John Manzon-Santos, A&PI Wellness Center. “The key message we want to communicate is that families play an important role in stopping silence and shame around HIV/AIDS in A&PI communities.”

The National A&PI HIV/AIDS Awareness Day sprouted from the Banyan Tree Project, which is funded by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. The Banyan Tree Project is a ground-breaking national campaign designed to foster acceptance and compassion towards A&PIs at risk for, or with HIV/AIDS. Other campaign activities include the development of public service announcements (PSAs) dramatizing the critical issue of HIV/AIDS in A&PI communities.

The PSAs will be screened at the May 19<sup>th</sup> event and televised nationally through CBS, Comcast and other networks in May and June. A Banyan Tree pledge form was also developed to “grow” awareness and acceptance by collecting signatures nationally to fight stigma and discrimination.

By informing, teaching and setting a positive example, the project’s goal is to stop the cycle of discrimination and silence, by eliminating barriers that delay or prevent access to HIV prevention and care services.

According to Manzon-Santos, “Our cultures too often value silence and saving face at all costs. We need to give ourselves and our families the permission to openly discuss topics that affect all of our families – sex, sexuality, drug use, and life-threatening illnesses like HIV. Let’s figure out together how to create this space at our dinner tables, within our religious congregations, and in

our newspapers and TV stations to talk about how to keep our families healthy and whole.”  
The National Asian & Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Awareness Day media partners include CBS5/UPN (San Francisco broadcast media sponsor), Comcast (broadband media sponsor) and Cable Positive (national and local broadcast media sponsor).

A&PI Wellness Center's mission is to educate, support, empower, and advocate for A&PI communities – particularly A&PIs living with or at-risk for HIV/AIDS. A&PI Wellness Center is the oldest nonprofit organization in North America targeting A&PI communities around sexual health and HIV.

For more information on A&PI Wellness Center, go to [www.apiwellness.org](http://www.apiwellness.org) or call 415/292-3400. For more information about the May 19<sup>th</sup> event and the Banyan Tree Project, go to [www.banyantreeproject.org](http://www.banyantreeproject.org) or call 1-866-5BANYAN.

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