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Contact: David Stuppelbeen  
Media & Communications Coordinator, A&PI Wellness Center  
Telephone: 415.292.3420 ext. 361 | Fax: 415.292.3404  
E-mail: [das@apiwellness.org](mailto:das@apiwellness.org) \* Web: <http://www.apiwellness.org>

**AIDS CRISIS IN COMMUNITIES OF COLOR PROMPTS DEMAND FOR NATIONAL PLAN TO FIGHT HIV/AIDS**

Public Health Advocates Deliver Demand during the Democratic National Convention Calling on Senators Barack Obama and John McCain to Support a Comprehensive National AIDS Strategy

**Los Angeles, CA** -- In a historically unprecedented move, over 30 national HIV/AIDS organizations and leaders representing African-American, Latino, Native American/Alaska Native, and Asian & Pacific Islander communities have joined forces in an urgent call for the development and implementation of a comprehensive national AIDS strategy. The demands to the Democratic and Republican presidential nominees come in response to long standing concerns about unmet needs for targeted HIV research, treatment access, medical care and prevention in communities of color. A recently-released report from the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on estimates of new HIV infections in the United States amplifies the crises faced in communities of color.

According to the CDC's alarming new estimates, communities of color account for a combined total of **65%** of the approximately 56,300 new HIV infections occurring in the United States. By the CDC's own admission, this new estimate is 40% higher than the CDC's earlier estimate of 40,000 infections per year. The startling new HIV rates are of special concern for people of color who are more likely to die from the disease than HIV-infected whites. AIDS advocates representing communities of color have long expressed dissatisfaction with the current lethargic, fragmented and unaccountable U.S. response to the epidemic, which they point out, is a direct result of the non-existent national plan.

Leading national HIV organizations and leaders representing communities of color convened at the Ford Foundation in New York City in August 2008 to formulate a national HIV response to the new administration that will take office in January 2009. Pledging to work together to strengthen the HIV/AIDS response nationally, and in their own communities these organizations agreed on an urgent seven-point action plan.

The action points stipulate first and foremost the urgent need for the next administration to rapidly initiate a National AIDS Strategy that engages the entire federal government in the fight against HIV and holds each department accountable for improved results in communities of color. Ironically, the U.S. government requires foreign countries receiving American HIV/AIDS assistance to have a national strategy for addressing the epidemic, where there is none in place in our own country. The action plan also demands that the federal government improve its inadequate data gathering methods, currently accounting for only 33 out of the 50 states and 5 dependent territories, excluding other states and territories severely impacted by the epidemic. This flawed process results in the underestimation of HIV rates and impedes efforts to allocate adequate resources to address HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and

care for all at-risk Americans.

Public health advocates also stress that the socio-economic drivers of the epidemic disproportionately impact communities of color. Such factors include poverty, limited educational opportunities, gender inequities, homophobia, HIV stigma and inadequate health access. The needs of communities of color are further compromised by the current administration's response to the epidemic including a derisory allocation of only 4% of HIV-related domestic spending towards HIV prevention efforts and the flat-funding of the Minority HIV/AIDS Initiative for the past six years despite increasing rates of transmission in people of color communities during that time.

The partnering organizations and leaders stand together to demand concrete action from the new President and his administration. The organizations and leaders represent various individuals, including health service providers, policy makers, physicians, medical schools and people living with HIV/AIDS. The representatives come together from across the country including Hawaii. Together, they bring a voice to the needs of people in urban, rural and native reservation communities.

The time has come for all American leaders, regardless of political affiliation, to support the development and implementation of a comprehensive national plan focused on prevention, treatment, and care for communities of color.

Partnering organizations include: Asian & Pacific Islander Wellness Center, BIENESTAR, Black AIDS Institute, Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, Inc., National Minority AIDS Council, National Native American AIDS Prevention Center, The Balm In Gilead and National Association of People with AIDS.

#### **About A&PI Wellness Center**

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 and largest nonprofit in North America focusing on sexual health and HIV/AIDS in A&PI communities. With three sites in the San Francisco Bay Area and a 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 about the free Hepatitis B testing services go to [www.apowellness.org](http://www.apowellness.org).

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