

PRESS RELEASE

The South Asian Health Project & The Asian Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS

Presented A Forum on Sexual Health on April 26, 2006

Three breakthrough studies on South Asian communities in the U.S. and Sexual Health, including HIV/AIDS and reproductive health, were presented

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New York, NY--The South Asian Health Project (the Health Project) and the Asian Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS (APICHA) partnered to host *The Healthy Living Campaign for South Asians: A Forum on Sexual Health* on April 26, 2006. Three exploratory studies that focused on Sexual Health and South Asian Americans were presented by researchers John Chin, Ph.D., Margaret Abraham, Ph.D. and Nereida Correa, MD. All three studies cited key cultural barriers to accessing information and using services, including denial of the prevalence of risky sexual behaviors among South Asians and fear of stigma and isolation by family & community members. Recommendations for next steps by the researchers include:

- Improving data collection and reporting as well as increasing the sample size of participants in larger studies
- Addressing barriers to accessing and utilizing services
- Increasing community collaboration and input
- Developing a multilevel, multi-strategy approach to HIV/AIDS Education, Prevention and Treatment

Also speaking at the forum were The Honorable Upendra Chivukula, Assemblyman (D-17) – NJ, The Honorable John Liu, Council Member (D-20) – NYC, Ann Thomas, Counsel to the Health Committee – New York City Council and Grace Moon, Deputy Director, Bureau of HIV/AIDS Prevention and Control, DOHMH. Shazia Khan, Reporter – NY1 News was the Mistress of Ceremonies and Arpana Inman, Ph.D. the guest moderator.

All of the speakers emphasized that it is crucial to work towards ending the disparity that exists in healthcare for South Asian Americans and to try to irradiate the cultural barriers that prevent South Asians from accessing available services. They also acknowledged that much more research needs to be done to clearly ascertain the scope and magnitude of the problem on HIV/AIDS within the South Asian American communities.

Council Member John C. Liu stated: "There's still a great deal of work we need to do in our communities to educate and mobilize people about reproductive and sexual health issues. The first step is to understand and prioritize our health needs, which the South Asian Health Project and APICHA have done so well today. The second step is to mobilize community members to push for change in our government institutions and political agenda."

Assemblyman Chivukula concurred by stating: "I would like to commend the South Asian Health Project and APICHA for this forum on sexual health, a topic community members shy away from. The critical nature of sexual health, as a part of overall health, underscores the importance of education and awareness which is needed to prevent sexually transmitted diseases. It is important that we continue to bring these and other health issues to the forefront in the South Asian community."

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The South Asian Health Project (the Health Project)

*Founded in 2002 in New York, the South Asian Health Project (www.southasianhealth.org) started with a vision to eliminate health disparities among minority communities, viewing healthy life and access to medical care as a right and as an issue of social justice. As an emerging community-based organization, the Health Project aims to ensure that all individuals of South Asian origin are provided with the opportunity to achieve a healthy mind and body as well as a good quality of life. The Health Project recognizes that its mission “**Achieving Health Equity for individuals of South Asian origin through individual and community empowerment**” can only be fulfilled through empowerment of the individual, family and community and that such empowerment requires both education and advocacy.*

The Health Project also provides opportunities to develop and implement new and innovative strategies such as shifting dialogue from disease and treatment to healthy lifestyles and prevention; beyond needs and deficits to strengthening community assets. The initial geographic areas for programs are New York and New Jersey where one quarter of all South Asians in the U.S.(400,000+) live.

Asian Pacific Islander Coalition on HIV/AIDS (APICHA)

Founded in 1989, APICHA (www.apicha.org) has over fifteen years of experience providing holistic and culturally competent HIV/AIDS services targeted to Asians and Pacific Islanders.

APICHA currently offers a continuum of services using a one-stop shop service delivery model.

These are:

- **Health Education and Prevention Services:** Peer-delivered outreach, group and individual risk reduction interventions to promote behavioral change and self-efficacy; community events; social marketing campaigns to encourage support for safe behaviors; translations and interpretations for Asian & Pacific Islanders with limited English skills and Infoline (**1-866-APICHA9**) – a toll free service staffed by bilingual peer counselors who speak Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, Tagalog, Japanese, Bengali, Urdu, and Thai.
- **Health Care Services:** *Free and affordable HIV primary care, screening and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases (STD), HIV testing and counseling, dental health referrals, and mental health assessments.*

- *Support Services: Case management, food and nutrition, acupuncture, support groups, legal assistance, and emergency financial assistance.*
- *Research, Policy Analysis and Advocacy: Activities that address gaps in knowledge about Asian & Pacific Islanders health and current policy issues through APICHA's initiative or conducted in collaboration with research institutions and/or consulting researchers and other AIDS service organizations.*
- *Capacity Building Assistance: Workshops and technical assistance to Asian & Pacific Islanders - serving CBOs and health departments are provided in partnership with the Asian & Pacific Islander American Health Forum.*