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Southern states need better AIDS strategy

Commentary By Marisa Treviño

Health professionals are usually careful about using the term "crisis" when addressing a health care issue. Yet officials with the [Latino Commission on AIDS](#) didn't hesitate to use the term to describe the findings in a new study. The two-year project found that HIV/AIDS cases are rising at alarming rates among the [2 million](#) Latinos in Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina and Tennessee. Prevention education isn't keeping pace.

Demographers have noted that the South is one of the regions that have seen the most rapid influx of Latino workers. Census figures for 2000 show that these states — not the traditional destinations of Spanish-speaking immigrants — had a more than [200% growth](#) in Latino populations in 10 years. So with a steady influx of Latinos, and a growing number of them contracting HIV/AIDS, why aren't states making inroads via aggressive public awareness campaigns in attacking this preventable and treatable disease?

My guess: The targets of these messages — which include legal and undocumented workers — don't trust the messenger. According to a report by the non-profit [Progressive States Network](#), every state identified by the study, with the exception of Alabama, has passed policies criminalizing undocumented immigration. These laws intimidate people from seeking any assistance. For example, South Carolina passed a series of laws that include establishing a hotline to report unsuspected non-residents and making it a crime to transport or harbor undocumented immigrants.

As a result of this anti-immigrant climate and the high rate of people without health insurance, the report found, many HIV-infected Latinos don't seek medical attention until they are in its late stages.

But some states are trying to confront this crisis. In October, North Carolina conducted a bilingual campaign to [encourage people](#) to get tested. Even so, the report found that these states didn't have enough bilingual professionals to address the crisis.

The study made several recommendations, all rooted in communication. Whether it's utilizing more Spanish-language media to market prevention programs, training more people to speak Spanish, partnering with Latino organizations to replicate their successful programs or connecting with Hispanic religious and community leaders, it all comes down to opening lines of communication to a population that has been forced to stay in the shadows of society. For their health and for the health of the country, these Latinos must come forward — and the sooner the better.

Marisa Treviño, who lives in Dallas, writes a blog, [Latina Lista](#)

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fairfoundation wrote: <1m ago

Ms. Trevino, if HIV/AIDS is a "crisis" when it is killing 2,425 Latinos (#1) then what do we call cardiovascular disease that is responsible for a third of all Latino deaths? (#2) You diminish your weak argument further with such exaggerations, including that HIV cases in Latinos is increasing at "alarming rates." The CDC puts Latino HIV cases at 6,903 (#3) when the overall Latino population, including illegal immigrants is approximately 60 million. (#4)

Our government has spent approximately \$300 billion (#5) on HIV since 1981 and billions more have been spent by the Bill Gates Foundation, pharmaceutical companies and Hollywood.

The US research funding is now \$2,774 on each AIDS patient versus \$39 on each diabetic and similar small amounts on virtually every other disease. (#6)

Our country's top HIV/AIDS researcher and the man that oversees our country's billion dollar AIDS budget, Anthony Fauci, MD, has said, "...the scientific advancements that have been made in HIV [research] are breathtaking [with] highly effective drugs to suppress HIV to the point where what was a death sentence in the early eighties to now having patients who look and feel well, who are leading very productive, very gratifying lives..." (#7)

It is now time to take some of the excessive funding for HIV and re-allocate it to other diseases killing millions more Americans annually, and a reasonable portion should also go to the 6,000 rare illnesses that now each get, on average, \$200,000 per disease for research compared to the \$2.9 billion for HIV research.

Dr. Richard Darling
President & CEO
FAIR Foundation www.fairfoundation.org (joining is free)

#1 <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/reports/2006report/table7.htm>

#2 http://www.nhlbi.nih.gov/health/hearttruth/material/factsheet_latina.pdf

#3 <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/reports/2006report/table5a.htm>

#4 http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/FASTATS/hispanic_health.htm

#5 http://fairfoundation.org/total_HIV-funding_est.htm

#6 <http://www.fairfoundation.org/factslinks.htm>

#7 http://fairfoundation.org/CNN_Fauci.wmv

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yipee wrote: 22h 36m ago

It is important to differentiate matters of public health from concerns about illegal immigration to this country. Public health concerns pertain to the health of the public and

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HIV is a disease most associated with sexual transmission. Whether someone is here legally or not, it is in the public health interest that we try to reduce the number of new infections for the benefit of everyone present in the United States. Disease does not recognize borders and you cannot wish disease away by passing laws. The best possible health outcome is that people who are infected are tested early in the disease and given treatment that reduces that amount of HIV virus in their blood. This in turn makes it less likely they will be able to infect others and the public at large is better protected. If we bar the immigrants from early treatment they will progress to AIDS and require more expensive emergency room care.

[Recommend](#) | [Report Abuse](#)**Ronald David** wrote: 12/19/2008 3:22:03 PM

Dare we ask Marisa Treviño where 'Prevention Education' IS keeping pace?'

In Texas perhaps?

Has the HIV/AIDS pandemic declined anywhere so well that people can applaud 'prevention education'? I don't think so.

If indeed HIV/AIDS is so prevalent among homosexuals, blacks, and latinos, why spend money on prevention education?

What is needed is to tell English reading folks -- in English only -- to be careful who they enjoy unprotected sex with, and let nature take its toll!

No matter what is done (or not done), the cost to tax payers will not decrease.

citizensrevolt states; "...reducing annual legal immigration and a far more rigorous health screening..."

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Ahhh yes, once again if only we would stop persecuting "immigrants" (what she really means is illegal aliens), switch to Spanish for everything, and surrender our sovereignty all problems and troubles would just vanish. How charming.....

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I must be missing something here. There are potentially millions of people here illegally, they get sick, and the burden is on US to speak their language to improve their lifestyle, when they shouldn't be here in the first place?

It is this kind of arrogance from the Latino mouthpieces that fuels the illegal immigration backlash.

I don't want to see people suffer, but there are lots of risks involved with being in a country illegally, including health risks.

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if english speaking people can read and learn the importance of safe sex wouldnt it be easier to just have the latino community learn the language of the land rather than hiring more people to cater to them? the brochures and information is out there. if they really cared enough youd think theyd make the effort to learn.

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citizensrevolt wrote: 12/19/2008 12:47:59 AM

Obviously, this column goes to illustrate the necessity for better enforcement of our borders as well as reducing annual legal immigration and a far more rigorous health screening for those permitted to come here.

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