



News Release

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STATE AND FEDERAL HEALTH OFFICIALS, COMMUNITY LEADERS TO ADDRESS CHALLENGES OF HIV/AIDS AND STDs IN THE SOUTH

(Charlotte, NC) The impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in the South – the region estimated to have the greatest number of people living with AIDS in the United States – will be the focus of a conference to be held November 13-15 in Charlotte, NC, that will bring together state AIDS directors, legislators, federal health officials and community advocates.

Former Surgeon General Dr. David Satcher will deliver the keynote address to the “Southern States Summit on HIV/AIDS & STDs,” convened by The Kaiser Family Foundation and the National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors, in partnership with the Southern State AIDS Directors Work Group. Participants will address the critical and unique challenges faced by states in the Southern region of the U.S. in responding to the HIV/AIDS and STD epidemics.

A new background report prepared by the Kaiser Family Foundation for the Summit shows that the South has more people estimated to be living with AIDS than the Northeast, Midwest and Western regions of the United States, and the proportion of people living with AIDS in the South has been increasing. The estimated number of new AIDS cases in the South increased between 2000 and 2001, while other regions experienced declines or relatively stable levels. Eighteen of the top 25 U.S. communities hardest hit by the HIV/AIDS epidemic are in Southern states. In addition to HIV, the South also has the highest case rates for syphilis, chlamydia, and gonorrhea in the nation.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic in the South has also disproportionately affected African Americans. More than half (53% in 1999) of people estimated to be living with AIDS in the South are African American, who constitute only 19% of the overall Southern population.

By bringing key groups together, organizers of the conference hope to raise awareness of the extent of the impact of HIV/AIDS and STDs in the South. The Southern region of the U.S., as defined by the Census Bureau, includes 16 states and the District of Columbia. Those participating in the summit are: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.

“The HIV/AIDS epidemic remains a critical health concern for the U.S. as a whole, but is especially troubling for the Southern region,” said Drew E. Altman, Ph.D., president and CEO of the Kaiser Family Foundation. “By bringing these key groups together to strategize on combating HIV/AIDS and STDs in the Southern U.S., we hope to be able to make great strides towards reducing the disproportionate effects of these epidemics on minority Americans.”

Participants in the Summit will also discuss federal, state, and local funding issues and programs available to provide services to the people affected by the epidemics in those states.

“NASTAD is hopeful that the Southern States Summit will help focus the nation’s attention on the faces of HIV and STDs in the South, on the severe impact of these epidemics on African American communities in particular, and on the urgent need for us to work together at the federal, state and local levels to provide desperately needed prevention, care and treatment services,” said Julie Scofield, Executive Director of NASTAD.

Other documents to be released at the Summit include a state-by-state overview of the financing and care programs available to people living with HIV/AIDS and a review of federal funding for HIV/AIDS available in each of the Southern states.

“Here in North Carolina, we simply do not have the resources – federal, state or local – to meet the prevention, care, and treatment needs of people with and at-risk for HIV/AIDS and STDs. We need help to address this crisis – people’s lives are at stake. This Summit is designed to help bring attention, and ultimately, the help we need to address these unmet needs,” said Evelyn Foust, director of AIDS and STDs in the Department of Health and Human Services in the summit’s host state of North Carolina.

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation is a non-profit, independent national health care philanthropy dedicated to providing information and analysis on health issues to policymakers, the media and the general public. The Foundation is not associated with Kaiser Permanente or Kaiser Industries.

The National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors represents the nation’s chief state health agency staff who have programmatic responsibility for administering AIDS health care, prevention, education and supportive service programs funded by state and federal governments. State AIDS Directors in all 50 U.S. states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the U.S. Pacific Islands are represented by NASTAD with an office in Washington, DC. Programs administered by NASTAD members serve every population affected by and infected with HIV.

A webcast of selected summit sessions will be available on kaisernetwork.org, a free service of the Kaiser Family Foundation, after 5:00 pm ET on Monday, November 18. The webcast, transcript, and related resources will be available at <http://www.kaisernetwork.org/healthcast/kff/14nov02>.

A list of media contacts for each state participating in this conference is also available.

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