

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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HHS Launches Initiative to Improve the Health of Hispanic Elders

HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt today announced an initiative to improve the health and quality of life of Hispanic elders.

The HHS initiative “Improving Hispanic Elders’ Health: Community Partnerships for Evidence-Based Solutions” is designed to encourage Hispanic elders and their families to take advantage of new Medicare benefits, including prescription drug coverage, flu shots, diabetes screening and self-management, cardiovascular screening, cancer screening services and smoking cessation programs.

“This unprecedented partnership will make it easier for communities to help Hispanic elders, especially those with chronic health conditions and limited resources, to overcome barriers that impede their access to healthcare and social supports that can improve their health,” Secretary Leavitt said.

Findings from the 2006 National Healthcare Disparities Report prepared by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) show that persistent and growing health disparities exist among Hispanic elders compared to the non-Hispanic white elderly population. To address this issue, AHRQ, the Administration on Aging, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Centers for Medicare & Medicare Services and the Health Resources and Services Administration are teaming up to assist local communities in developing more coordinated strategies for improving the health and well-being of Hispanic elders.

The initiative will also help Hispanic elders take advantage of a Chronic Disease Self-Management Program developed by Stanford University with funding from HHS that has proven effective in reducing the risk of chronic disease and disability among Hispanic elders.

The HHS initiative will be piloted in up to seven metropolitan areas with large Hispanic elder populations. HHS will start by convening a workshop where teams from the invited areas will learn about state-of-the-art strategies and tactics they can deploy to address disparities among their Hispanic elder populations. The teams will be comprised of representatives from local public health providers, Hispanic community organizations, aging service providers and the health care sector. The teams that appear ready to launch community-wide mobilization efforts will be invited to participate in a year-long national learning network project that will utilize Web casts, conference calls and peer-to-peer meetings to facilitate cross-site learning and innovation. The communities invited to apply for this pilot project are:

Chicago, Ill., El Paso, Texas; Houston, Texas; Los Angeles, Calif.; McAllen, Texas; Miami, Fla.; New York, N.Y.; San Antonio, Texas; San Diego, Calif.

These nine areas have been invited to apply for this pilot project because of their high concentrations of Hispanic elderly as well as to ensure that there is an appropriate geographic distribution of areas across the country in the initiative. Selection of up to seven communities will be based on criteria that will be posted on the Web site listed below.

Hispanics comprise the largest minority group in the United States. The number of older Hispanics is growing rapidly. By 2028, Hispanics will be the largest minority population in the 65 and over age group, reaching 7.1 million and comprising over 10 percent of the elderly population. Historically, there have been a number of financial, organizational, cultural and linguistic barriers to providing appropriate health and social services to Hispanic elders which exacerbate their growing health disparities. For example, Hispanic elders are much more likely to be hospitalized for diabetes due to poor diabetes control, and they are far less likely to receive pneumonia or flu shots or cancer screening services.

The deadline for applications is Tuesday, July 24, 2007. While any member of the proposed teams may serve as the lead, the local Area Agencies on Aging are being asked to submit the application. Area Agencies on Aging are federally designated entities responsible for area-wide planning and coordination on matters that affect the area's aging population. For more details about "Improving Hispanic Elders' Health: Community Partnerships for Evidence-Based Solutions," visit <http://www.academyhealth.org/ahrq/elders>.

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Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press materials are available at <http://www.hhs.gov/news>.