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Eight Communities Selected to Participate in HHS Hispanic Elders Health Initiative *Pilot Project to Focus on Diabetes and Other Health Disparities*

HHS Assistant Secretary for Aging Josefina G. Carbonell and Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) Director Carolyn Clancy today announced that eight communities will participate in an HHS pilot initiative to improve the health and quality of life of Hispanic elders.

The metropolitan areas of Chicago, Ill., Houston, Texas; Los Angeles, Calif., McAllen, Texas; Miami, Fla.; New York, NY; San Antonio, Texas; and San Diego, Calif., have been selected to take part in the pilot project launched earlier this year by HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt titled “Improving Hispanic Elders’ Health: Community Partnerships for Evidence-Based Solutions.” This unique collaboration is designed to help communities work together to develop coordinated strategies for improving Hispanic elders’ access to important benefits, including the new Medicare prescription drug and prevention benefits as well as low-cost evidence-based prevention programs such as the Stanford University Chronic Disease Self-Management Program and other initiatives that can reduce health disparities.

“We are very enthusiastic about the level of commitment already being generated by these eight communities. Each brings a wealth of information and experience in addressing health disparities for elders in their communities and a strong desire to make a difference,” said Assistant Secretary Carbonell. “What we learn through this partnership will be shared with other communities across the nation.”

Each community team will be developing and implementing a plan for addressing one or more health disparity. In their applications, most of the communities identified diabetes as a primary issue of concern for their population. Hispanic elders have a higher incidence of certain chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease and arthritis, than the rest of the U.S. population. Twenty-one percent of Hispanic elders have diabetes compared to 14.3 percent of non-Hispanic whites. 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 participate in cancer screening services.

The eight teams will participate in a workshop scheduled for Oct. 23-25, 2007, at the Renaissance Houston Hotel Greenway Plaza in Houston, Texas, as the kick-off event to a year-long learning network that will help them to share strategies, tactics and data with each other and with leading researchers and other experts in the field. The community teams will consist of representatives from the local area agency on aging, Hispanic community organizations, local public health agency, aging service providers, the medical community, and health services research organizations.

“This pilot project will help these communities enhance the health and well-being of their Hispanic elderly population by encouraging the use of evidence-based information and the new benefits available under Medicare,” said AHRQ Director Carolyn M. Clancy. “Our ultimate goal is to eliminate health care disparities for Hispanic elders and other vulnerable populations.”

The initiative is based on findings from the National Healthcare Disparities Report 2006 prepared by the AHRQ. The report finds that persistent and growing health disparities exist among Hispanic/Latino elders compared to the majority, non-Hispanic white elderly population.

Hispanics comprise the largest minority group in the United States. The number of older Hispanics is growing rapidly. By 2050, Hispanics will be the fastest growing population in the 65 and over age group, reaching 15 million. 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.

The five agencies participating in this HHS initiative are the Administration on Aging, AHRQ, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and Health Resources and Services Administration. Each agency is lending its support and expertise to this important initiative in order to improve the quality of life for America’s Hispanic elders.

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>.