HIV/AIDS & Aging: Myths & Realities

Tuesday, September 18, 2012 is the 5th Annual observation of National HIV/AIDS Aging and Awareness Day (NHAAAD). The AIDS Institute created NHAAAD in 2007 to shed light on the challenging issues the U.S. aging population faces with regards to HIV prevention, testing, care and treatment. In addition, NHAAAD highlights the increased need for prevention, research, and data targeting the U.S. aging population, as well as medical understanding of the aging process and its impact on HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS & Aging
In 2009, nearly one fourth (23%) of people diagnosed with AIDS in the United States were ages 50+. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimate that by 2015 about half the people living with HIV will be 50+. Yet, older adults—especially Latino seniors who are at a disproportionate risk—are often disconnected from and overlooked in the HIV/AIDS dialogue.

The Risk of HIV Among Older Adults
Seniors may have the same risk factors for HIV infections as younger populations:

• Practicing Unsafe Sex – Many older adults think they are “too old” to get infected with HIV. Older women are potentially at higher risk because of age-related factors (i.e., vaginal dryness and thinning).

• Lack of Information – Many seniors are unaware of HIV/AIDS, how it is spread and how to protect themselves from infection.

• Stigma – Older adults, especially diverse elders, may face discrimination and stigma. This can lead to late testing, reluctance to seek services, and hiding their status from friends and family.

• Misdiagnosis – Health care professionals could misdiagnose AIDS as its symptoms are similar to aging-related symptoms: weight loss, fatigue, and mental confusion.

• Underestimated Risk – Health care professionals could also underestimate older adults patients’ risk for HIV/AIDS. This leads to lack of testing and preventive messages that could lead to an early diagnosis.

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2 Older Adults and HIV/AIDS http://www.aoa.gov/AoARoot/AoA_Programs/HPW/HIV_AIDS/index.aspx
Why Latino Families Should Talk HIV
The Latino community is disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. Hispanics accounted for an estimated 20% of new HIV infections in 2009 despite representing only 16% of the general U.S. population\(^3\). In fact, Latinos are three times as likely to get infected with HIV than non-Hispanic whites\(^4\).

How To Act Against AIDS
As one of three national Hispanic/Latino partners of the CDC's Act Against AIDS Leadership Initiative (AAALI) works to encourage an intergenerational, stigma-free dialogue within the Hispanic community by leveraging the influence and respect Latino seniors command in their families:

- Get the Facts: Visit the resource pages below to learn more about HIV/AIDS.
- Get Tested: Visit www.hivtest.org to find your closest testing site, or text your five-digit ZIP code to 566948 (KNOWIT).
- Get Involved: Start a conversation at home or online, volunteer for a local organization, be a part of a campaign.

Resources
National Hispanic Council on Aging – www.nhcoa.org/ActAgainstAIDS
The AIDS Institute – www.nhaaad.org
Act Against AIDS – www.actagainstaids.org
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – www.cdc.gov/hiv
Latino Commission on AIDS – www.latinoaids.org

\(^4\) Idem