

National Hispanic Health Symposium and Regional Meetings

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To ensure that the Hispanic Agenda for Action (HAA) receives community review, and to ensure that all Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regions conduct activities that support the HAA, Secretary Shalala called for a National Hispanic Health Symposium to precede the Hispanic Heritage Month celebration in 1997.

The symposium, "Building a Healthy Nation," was convened by HHS from September 11-13, 1997, in Los Angeles, CA. The National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organizations (COSSMHO), under a cooperative agreement with HHS, organized the logistics for the symposium.

The meeting brought together more than 500 HHS officials and Hispanic community-based leaders. This group jointly reviewed existing HHS plans for addressing the needs of Hispanic customers, discussed program models, and developed regional action plans. The level of community and federal participation in the Symposium represented a landmark in HHS' history of Hispanic initiatives.

The National Hispanic Health Symposium was a working meeting, with the first day consisting of senior HHS officials and community leaders participating in executive discussions that explored current issues and HHS plans for meeting the needs of Hispanic customers.

The second day was devoted to regional meetings in which participants decided how to examine the nine areas of the HHS Hispanic Agenda for Action (see article on front page). Some regions made recommendations under all nine areas, some chose to prioritize areas for immediate action, while other regions chose to identify priority issues and make recommendations that cut across the nine HAA areas.

The report that resulted lists broad regional recommendations. Regions are currently developing a process for updating the recommendations and setting priorities and time frames for implementation. A series of more detailed region-specific recommendations to guide the implementation of the HHS Hispanic Agenda for Action is currently being developed as well.

To date, eight of the ten regions have held official meetings with community-based organizations, while the other two regions are in the process of planning their meetings.

The following are descriptions of two of the regions that reported these recommendations as this issue of *Closing the Gap* went to press.

Region III Meeting

On July 22, 1998, a regional meeting was held in Philadelphia. Region III representatives (Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, Virginia, West Virginia, and the District of Columbia) reviewed recom-

mendations and discussed community needs and ways in which these needs can be addressed regionally. The meeting was organized by the Consortium for Latino Health.

This meeting was the first step at building a strong network within Region III between Latino and community-based groups and HHS.

Each agency within HHS presented information and a review of its mission. In the afternoon, community leaders described the major health issues affecting Latinos in their communities.

The group touched on many of the suggestions from the symposium and offered a few new suggestions including:

- using money from HMO's for reimbursement of health education for chronic diseases in Latino populations;
- using Hispanic media as a tool to educate the community about alternative medicine;
- inviting and including State representatives and other local government representatives to future meetings.

They also listed a series of "next steps", such as encouraging community based organizations to work with HHS to implement recommendations, and planning follow-up meetings between local Latino community-based organizations and Region III representatives.

Region VI Meeting

On August 20 and 21, 1998, Region VI conducted a two day meeting as a follow-up to the National Hispanic Health Symposium. All operating divisions in Region VI participated, with presentations outlining the agencies' missions and goals and their relationships to the Hispanic community. Additionally, staff was available to talk one-on-one with community representatives from New Mexico, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Texas. A total of 81 community members attended the conference.

During day two of the meeting, the group identified key issues and areas in which to review and prepare goals. Additionally, to assist the group in covering the entire region, they divided the Region into five districts to review, plan, and implement short- and long-term goals.

Other regions are planning meetings to follow up recommendations from the September 1997 Symposium. Updates on regional activities and progress toward symposium goals are available on the COSSMHO Web site at: www.cossmho.org. ❖

