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National Association of People with AIDS Supports CDC's Call for Routinely Offered HIV Testing in Medical Settings

NAPWA Continues to Support Counseling & Informed Consent to Testing

SLIVER SPRING, MD (Sept 21, 2006)—The National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA-US), which created National HIV Testing Day in 1995, applauds new federal recommendations to healthcare providers to routinely offer patients voluntary HIV testing, but also raises serious concerns with calls to eliminate pre-test counseling and informed, written consent to testing.

“Asking medical professionals to routinely offer HIV testing will go a long way at helping people with HIV know and take action on their health status,” said Frank Oldham, Jr., NAPWA executive director. “In fact, this is exactly why NAPWA launched National HIV Testing Day over a decade ago: to send a message to all Americans that testing is a right and an opportunity to achieve longer and better lives by becoming fully informed about the realities of HIV/AIDS.”

NAPWA released today its updated policy statement in support of voluntary HIV counseling and testing with informed or written consent. The new policy statement responds to new revised recommendations for HIV testing in healthcare settings by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). While not having the force of law, the recommendations are likely to influence state public health policy and federal HIV testing initiatives.

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Despite its support for routinely offered testing, NAPWA must be assured that any removal of written informed consent does not result in involuntary and uninformed HIV testing.

Counseling and informed written consent to testing have proven to be important activities that afford individuals accurate information about HIV disease, the testing process, and how HIV can be prevented or managed if the result is positive. These discussions help dispel common myths about HIV and reduce stigma against people living with HIV/AIDS. People who elect testing may be more likely to actively engage in their own healthcare, says NAPWA.

"NAPWA encourages all people to consider taking an HIV test," said NAPWA Board Chair Judith Billings of Puyallup, WA. "However, testing without consent is a violation of ethical medical standards, pure and simple, and the removal of counseling and informed consent will heighten chances these abuses occur."

"At this juncture of the epidemic, uninformed consent to testing, or no consent at all, is really a disservice to communities highly impacted by HIV/AIDS," said NAPWA Board Vice-Chair David Ernesto Munar of Chicago, IL. "Information is power. Approached correctly and with full information, people will make the right choices for themselves."

Saying voluntary HIV counseling and testing procedures can and should be improved to help reach more people, NAPWA calls on public health officials to pilot new ways to expedite counseling and the attainment of informed consent to testing. NAPWA also notes that expanded testing without corresponding increases in available HIV care and treatment services will mean many people learn their HIV-positive status but have no way to obtain the healthcare and support services that could save their lives.

NAPWA-US is the nation's first national AIDS organization and the world's oldest national network of people living with HIV/AIDS. To learn more about NAPWA and to download its HIV testing policy statement go to www.napwa.org.