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**NMAC Releases Publication on Puerto Rican HIV/AIDS Crisis**

**June 21, 2007 ~ Washington, D.C. ~** The **National Minority AIDS Council** (NMAC) has released a new publication entitled, *Monograph on the HIV/AIDS Crisis in Puerto Rico*. Rather than simply explain the bureaucratic problems around the AIDS health care emergency in PR, the monograph contains stories from those living with HIV/AIDS, their families and their caretakers who are feeling the direct impact of the system's eminent collapse.

"The emotional power of this report cannot be understated," Paul A. Kawata, Executive Director of NMAC says. "We hope everyone will read this monograph and contact their Congressperson to take action."

NMAC, under the leadership of James Albino, the agency's Government Relations and Public Policy Manager, and in collaboration with local HIV/AIDS agencies in Puerto Rico and mainland advocacy organizations, including the Latino Commission on AIDS, collected first-hand stories about the island's HIV/AIDS crisis. Albino, a former executive director of an HIV/AIDS hospice center in PR, visited patients and care givers throughout the island's HIV/AIDS community, hearing their concerns and collecting the pictures used in this report.

"Mismanagement and corruption among HIV/AIDS officials in PR unfortunately is nothing new," says Albino. "The Federal Bureau of Investigation, Office of the Inspector General and International Revenue Service raided the San Juan Eligible Metropolitan Area Offices, in summer 2005, due to allegations of graft. That pales to the current situation. PR's HIV/AIDS organizations never received their funding, forcing many of them to close their doors, layoff staff and/or curtail their services," Albino explains.

In summer 2006, the State Department of Health had instructed some clinics to stop accepting new patients for AIDS Drug Assistance Program, and the San Juan Municipal Health Department had tried, unsuccessfully, to transfer over 1,500 ADAP participants to the state program. By November, the Puerto Rico Legislature officially had to request the US Congress for relief in order to protect the lives of the 3,500 people living with HIV/AIDS currently at risk.

"The statistics concerning the decline of PR's HIV/AIDS services are alarming; but they are only half the story," Albino says. "We hope the profiles shared in *Monograph on the HIV/AIDS Crisis in Puerto Rico* illustrate how rationing medication, poorly maintained facilities and staff shortages do more than impact the federal government's bottom line—they cost people their lives. People are dying, because they cannot get HIV medication that should be readily available."

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The National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) was founded in 1987 to develop leadership within communities of color to address challenges of HIV/AIDS. NMAC has responded to the needs of communities of color by developing programs aimed at enhancing the skills necessary to confront this health crisis, including a public policy education program, national and regional training conferences, treatment and research programs and trainings, numerous publications and a website: [www.nmac.org](http://www.nmac.org). Today, NMAC is an association of AIDS service organizations providing valuable information to community-based organizations, hospitals, clinics and other groups assisting people and families living with and affected by the AIDS epidemic. NMAC's advocacy efforts are funded through private funders and donors only.