How the Media Can Help Fight HIV in Latino Communities

Soledad O'Brien and Dascha Polanco led a panel discussion on HIV and the media with ViiV Healthcare and Latino journalists.

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If you read the headlines in POZ and Tu Salud, then you're aware that HIV disproportionately affects minorities, including Black and Latino communities. In fact, although new HIV diagnoses have declined 12% overall across the United States between 2010 and 2022, they increased 24% among Latinos during that same time period. In fact, Latinos—notably men who have sex with men—accounted for 30% of new HIV cases in 2022 although they make up only 19% of the U.S. population.

Can the media help reverse this trend? That was the topic of a panel discussion spearheaded by HIV drugmaker ViiV Healthcare and the National Association of Hispanic Journalists earlier this week in Chicago.

Here's a promo for the event:

Titled "Rewriting the Headlines: The Media's Role in Ending HIV in the Hispanic Community," the discussion was moderated by journalist Soledad O'Brien and included actors Dascha Polanco (Orange Is the New Black, The Walking Dead and In the Heights) and Rafael de la Fuente (Dynasty, Fire Country and When We Rise), advocate Gabriel Maldonado (CEO of TruEvolution and a 2022 POZ 100 honoree) and Karla Torres, MD (a community medical liaison with ViiV Healthcare).

"It's 2025 and people living with HIV still experience a high degree of stigma," Torres said about the importance of the panel's discussion topic. "The truth is that words matter—how we talk about people and HIV matters, since it has the power to frame our entire experience.

She continued: "Journalists can play a critical role in helping to end the HIV epidemic because they have the power to educate by illuminating the reality of this crisis, while also shifting the narrative through telling the many success stories of people living with HIV."

In their exploration of the topic, panelists acknowledged that many factors influence the beliefs and discussions around HIV in the Latino community, such as family, faith and culture. They

shared the viewpoint that journalists can indeed play a role in altering the course of the HIV epidemic.

Journalists can help raise awareness by educating their audiences—for example, informing people about the disproportionate HIV rates in Latino communities and stressing the importance and effectiveness of HIV prevention, such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), which is available as daily pills and long-acting injectables for HIV-negative people at risk of contracting the virus.

Panelists also noted that as storytellers with a large and varied audience, journalists are uniquely positioned to shape the narratives around HIV and how it is presented in the popular culture.

They also highlighted the importance of community-based initiatives and leadership by influential voices—tools that can help reduce stigma and break down barriers in the Latino community.

To learn more, check out the POZ Basics "HIV and Latinos" and also click #Latino and #HIV. You'll find headlines such as:

"Laughter Is the Best Medicine: HIV advocate Daniel Garza uses humor to educate about sexual health and living a positive life,"

"Reducing Barriers to HIV Prevention Among Latinos in Texas ,"

"Vandals Deface The Wall Las Memorias AIDS Monument in Los Angeles ,"

"Un momento en el tiempo" and

"Tabla de Medicamentos Para el VIH 2024."

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