National Gay Men?s HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

September 26, 2008 By Oriol R. Gutierrez Jr.

The U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) recognizes nine HIV/AIDS awareness days ?to educate, motivate and mobilize? local communities.

They are:
Feb. 7 ? National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day
March 10 ? National Women & Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day
March 20 ? National Native HIV/AIDS Awareness Day
May 18 ? HIV Vaccine Awareness Day
May 19 ? National Asian & Pacific Islander HIV/AIDS Awareness Day
June 8 ? Caribbean American HIV/AIDS Awareness Day
June 27 ? National HIV Testing Day
Oct. 15 ? National Latino AIDS Awareness Day
Dec. 1 ? World AIDS Day

(National HIV/AIDS & Aging Awareness Day was launched this year on Sept. 18, but it’s not yet on the official HHS lineup.)

Each day is organized by at least one nonprofit organization representing the people being served by that day. For example, the Latino Commission on AIDS, the Hispanic Federation and other organizations created a group called the National Planning Committee to coordinate the National Latino AIDS Awareness Day.

There is no doubt in my mind that awareness days are effective in getting attention. The days stated above are all worthy of being awareness days?however, there is a serious omission in that list. Gay men have never had an awareness day to focus prevention and treatment messages on us?until now.

The National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA) commemorates the first National Gay Men?s HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on September 27. NAPWA created this new awareness day ?to refocus attention on a community that has long been affected by the HIV epidemic here in the United States and abroad.? During the next year, NAPWA will create a national steering committee for this new awareness day.

Some critics may say that an awareness day for gay men is unnecessary. I hope the fact that gay men represented more than half of new HIV infections in the United States in 2006 puts that criticism to rest.

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