



September 21, 2006

On behalf of the National Minority Health Month Foundation, I am pleased to offer my enthusiastic endorsement of the HIV testing recommendations released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

This past June marked the 25th anniversary of the first reported cases of AIDS in the United States. HIV/AIDS has had a devastating effect on America, claiming more than half a million lives. While much has been accomplished in the battle against the disease, it is time to evaluate how we are dealing with it.

We applaud the CDC for recognizing the crucial importance of HIV testing in preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS. The initial stages of HIV infection are symptomless, and routine testing will provide infected individuals with knowledge of their status and encourage them to begin needed care and treatment. We are pleased that the reauthorized Ryan White Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency (CARE) Act will include a new provision dedicated to preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS.

About 1.1 million people in the United States are living with HIV, and about 40,000 more are infected each year. The characteristics of the HIV/AIDS pandemic have changed dramatically since 1981, and our strategy for battling the disease must adapt to these changes. Minorities now account for about three-fourths of new HIV infections, and women account for almost one-fourth.

We agree with the CDC that the first principle of a new approach to fighting HIV/AIDS must be the inclusion of HIV testing as part of routine care in traditional medical settings. About one-fourth of infected Americans do not know their HIV status. Unaware that they are infected, they are not receiving the care and treatment they urgently need and they are more likely to infect others.

We commend the CDC for proposing a forward-looking strategy to confront the disease. We call upon federal, state, and local leaders to help implement the CDC recommendations, which will help to bring needed care, treatment, and relief to communities across the country.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'G. Puckrein', is written over a horizontal line.

Gary Puckrein, PhD
Executive Director