



Hon. Pedro R. Pierluisi  
National Latino AIDS Awareness Day (NLAAD)  
October 14, 2009

Thank you all for joining us today to mark the seventh annual National Latino AIDS Awareness Day.

Today is about the past, the present, and the future. It is a somber day, one on which our thoughts turn naturally to those we have lost—our friends, family members and loved ones who were taken from us by AIDS. It is also a day to think about how we can provide better care for those in our communities who are currently living with HIV/AIDS. Finally, it is day to reflect upon the ways in which we can improve prevention and treatment for generations to come.

If I were asked to summarize what today is all about, I would suggest two words: candor and commitment.

First, candor. Every day, but especially today, it is important to speak candidly about the HIV/AIDS problem in Hispanic communities around the country, to assess honestly the progress we have made in the fight against this disease, and to acknowledge openly the obstacles we have yet to overcome. Because we cannot vanquish what we do not understand. In 2005, HIV/AIDS was the fourth leading cause of death among Hispanic men and women aged 35 to 44. In that year, the rate of new HIV infections among Hispanics was three times that of whites.

Puerto Rico, my home, has been particularly affected by this epidemic. On the one hand, much progress has been made over the past 20 years. The AIDS mortality rate has decreased substantially due to medical advancements in treatment. Despite this, we still have a ways to go in combating this disease in Puerto Rico. The Island's HIV/AIDS prevalence rate is among the highest in the nation. Estimates place the total number of residents living with the disease at 33,000. The rate of new infections on the Island is twice the national average.

Second, today is a day to demonstrate our commitment. Every day, but especially today, it is imperative that we reaffirm—through words, but more importantly through deeds—our fierce determination to do battle against HIV/AIDS. We must renew our pledge to educate our young men and women—whether they live in New York City, El Paso, or in San Juan—about the overriding importance of taking personal responsibility for their actions and for practicing safe sex. And we must do everything we can to pursue medical advancements that will extend and improve the lives of those who test positive. Our search for a cure must be unrelenting. Anything less is unacceptable.

Thank you again for being here today.