

## Florida: A Leader in HIV Prevention Among Minority Communities

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Florida's minority communities have faced significant challenges in the fight against HIV and AIDS. Recent data show that Blacks comprise 15 percent of the adult population; yet represent over half (53 percent) of AIDS cases and 45 percent of HIV cases. Recognizing these challenges, public health leaders and community leaders have come together to make an impact on this health crisis.

Nearly 10 years ago, the Florida Department of Health sought to address this disparity and launched the *We Make the Change* campaign – a statewide media campaign designed to increase awareness of HIV/AIDS and its impact on minority communities. The Department reasoned that the more informed and educated minorities were regarding HIV/AIDS, the more likely communities would take control of their health and get tested for HIV.

This rationale appears to have not only increased HIV testing in Florida, but also has mobilized minority outreach targeting key communities: black and Hispanic women, black and Hispanic men who have sex with men, and black and Hispanic faith-based groups.

The campaign was founded on the premise that together we are a powerful threat against the AIDS epidemic in Florida. We do it by turning our knowledge of HIV into action. We are extremely pleased with the results of this action, but we must keep the momentum going. There's a lot more work to be done.

One in five people with HIV in Florida do not even know they are infected. Testing and knowing one's HIV status is paramount to controlling and stopping this worldwide epidemic. According to the recent Florida annual report on HIV testing, in 2008, 373,102 HIV tests were conducted at Florida's registered testing sites, representing a 13 percent increase over the previous year. The report also details that increases in testing were recorded among all racial/ethnic groups, but especially blacks.

The various components of the *We Make the Change* campaign, as well as intense prevention outreach efforts from the local health departments all contribute to this increase in HIV testing among blacks.

*We Make the Change* continues to grow and stand strong as a multi-faceted, nationally recognized awareness program. Some of our innovative initiatives have been touted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's HIV prevention best practices. The campaign includes event outreach, both traditional and nontraditional advertising, online components including a Web site and blog, text messaging service to help identify local testing centers, as well as community based programs such as SOS (Sistas Organizing to Survive), LUCES (Latinas Unidas Contra el SIDA), AATI (African-American Testing Initiative), and AME initiative.

In 10 years the *We Make the Change* campaign has reached hundreds of thousands of people and has grown tremendously, but the philosophy behind the program remains the same; we can make changes in our own lives and in our community to stop the spread of HIV infection. It's our commitment to take control of our health that builds the foundation for strong families, strong communities, and a strong message: we are more powerful than the disease.

For more information visit [www.WeMaketheChange.com](http://www.WeMaketheChange.com).