



National Resource Center for Hispanic Mental Health
Changing Minds, Transforming Lives, Advancing Knowledge
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NRCHMH Executive Director Raises Awareness of Puerto Rican Mental Health

MERCERVILLE, N.J. – June 11, 2010 – On May 25, 2010, the President's Task Force on Puerto Rico's Status held a public hearing in Washington, D.C., the Task Force's second hearing since President Obama took office. At the hearing, Henry Acosta, MA, MSW, LSW, Executive Director of the National Resource Center for Hispanic Mental Health, provided comments to both the full President's Task Force and the Subcommittee on Strengthening Community Services, Building Capacity and Sustainability, which were very well received.

Mr. Acosta testified to the importance of adequately and appropriately meeting the mental health needs of individuals in Puerto Rico and how a failure to properly address the mental health needs can severely hinder both the well-being and productivity of the individuals living in Puerto Rico as well as the overall development of the island's economy. "There needs to be a focus on community education around mental health issues and the benefits of treatment, workforce development at all levels of employment and systematic changes that will improve social environmental factors and remove barriers to the availability of, access to and the provision of high quality mental health service delivery," noted Mr. Acosta.

Mr. Acosta indicated that community education about the benefits of mental health treatment and systems capacity building, stigma elimination efforts and family education are key components of the systematic changes that are needed in Puerto Rico. "The significant loss of manufacturing jobs over the last decade, the decrease in tourism resulting from the economic recession and the high rates of Puerto Ricans in the lower echelon of income, educational attainment and occupational status across the island, collectively have had a profound impact on the mental health of countless individuals, and will impact the island's economic development regardless of its status," said Mr. Acosta. "Studies have found that individuals in the lower status of income, education and occupational status are two to three times more likely to have a mental disorder, and unfortunately, such individuals often lack health insurance." In addition, studies have found that poor mental health and psychological distress are linked to poverty. Overall, poverty rates on the island of Puerto Rico significantly exceed the rates in the mainland United States. "This is not good news and it must be addressed," stated Mr. Acosta. "Good health, which includes both emotional, mental health and physical health, is essential for any economy to exist, and to thrive."

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President Bill Clinton originally established the Task Force when he signed Executive Order 13183 in December of 2000. The Task Force is made up of designees of each member of the President's Cabinet and the Co-Chairs of the President's Interagency Group on Puerto Rico. President Barack Obama signed an Executive Order on October 30, 2009 to both preserve the Task Force's original mission, and to provide advice and recommendations to the President and the Congress on policies that promote job creation, education, health care, clean energy, and economic development on the island. The Task Force held its first public hearing in San Juan, Puerto Rico on March 3rd.

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The National Resource Center for Hispanic Mental Health was created to address the nationwide lack of availability of, access to and the provision of quality mental health services for Hispanics. The center was established as a result of the enormous success of the nationally and internationally recognized *Changing Minds, Advancing Mental Health for Hispanics* program, as well as the increasing need to enhance mental health services delivery for Hispanics throughout the United States. The National Resource Center for Hispanic Mental Health, a private non-profit charitable organization, has both a national presence and influence, and has its base of operations in Mercerville, New Jersey. The organization was developed as an outgrowth of the New Jersey Mental Health Institute, Inc. (NJMHI), which was created in 2000 by the New Jersey Association of Mental Health and Addiction Agencies (NJAMHAA). The NJMHI and the National Resource Center for Hispanic Mental Health are recognized leaders in providing a high-profile, comprehensive voice to change the perception, the impact and the outcome associated with current views of mental illness in New Jersey and around the nation. NJAMHAA is a statewide trade association representing more than 150 hospital-based and freestanding mental health and addiction agencies throughout New Jersey, committed to wellness and recovery for all children and adults.

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