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Assemblymember V. Manuel Pérez Hosts Policy Briefing on Public Health Emergency Planning

Integrating the Promotores model the subject of discussions

(SACRAMENTO) – Assemblyman V. Manuel Pérez partnered with the Health Initiative of the Americas (HIA) and the California Program on Access to Care, both programs of U.C. Berkeley, to host a policy briefing, “The Role of Promotores as Agents of Change in Public Health Emergencies.” Promotores, also known as community health outreach workers, serve as connectors between hard-to-reach communities and the organizations that respond to health emergencies. The briefing was held in the Legislative Office Building adjacent to the State Capitol.

Serving as moderator of the discussion, Assemblyman Perez said: “Today’s briefing offers more evidence of the enormous contribution promotores make to community health and well being. Promotores in my Assembly District act as a lifeline for working poor people that desperately lack access to basic care. As we embark on the process of health care reform, we cannot overlook community health workers and must consider what policies are needed to more closely integrate them into our delivery systems.”

A series of panels outlined the views and roles of the public health system, community clinics, researchers, and promotores themselves, reporting specifically on efforts during the initial H1N1 outbreak. Panelists emphasized the largely untapped resource of community health workers in responding to public health crises. Given their use of culturally competent approaches and outreach methods, a significant opportunity exists for health policy makers and planners to more effectively utilize promotores in emergency response planning.

Xochitl Castaneda, Director of the HIA, offered a framework for the ensuing discussion: “The inclusion of promotores as initial responders in a health emergency can enhance the ability of organizational efforts to effectively mobilize resources to protect vulnerable groups such as immigrant populations. The integration of promotores as members of the public health team will diversify the workforce serving underserved communities and improve the overall cultural and linguistic competency of health services providers.”

At same time of the Sacramento policy briefing, the Central Valley Health Policy Institute in Fresno also released a report with findings about the effectiveness of the promotora model in improving health care access for immigrants in Fresno County. More than 400 individuals and their families participated in two studies, conducted between 2007 and 2009 that found that the actions of promotores led to increased access to services like health insurance enrollment, establishing a medical home, and getting a physical for participating populations. The report can be found on the Institute’s web site at www.cvhpi.org.

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