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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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NAECHR Project Expands Efforts to Chicago and San Francisco

September 30, 2012 - Denver, CO – The Native American Engagement in HIV Clinical Research (NAEHCR) Project is proud to announce the launch of its expanded initiative. NAEHCR is a collaborative research project between The Legacy Project in Seattle, WA and National Native American AIDS Prevention Center (NNAAPC) in Denver, CO that is working to ensure that HIV clinical research sites and urban Native communities have the knowledge, resources, and skill sets to collaborate and raise the collective awareness of HIV, research, and issues that are impacting Native communities. The project seeks to build bridges between these two groups – battling a legacy of mistrust and abuse – that will allow them to dialogue about collective concerns, engage each other appropriately and respectfully, and create an environment that will allow Native community members to decide if they would like to be involved in the HIV clinical research process.

The project was created when it was realized, Native participation and active involvement in HIV clinical research in the changing the scope of HIV prevention, has been dismally low. In a time when biomedical interventions and cutting edge research are changing the way that HIV prevention is conducted, the NAEHCR project is seeking to ensure that Native American communities have a voice in the research being funded by the National Institutes of Health, Division of AIDS.

Though the project's formative research findings were intended to inform the development of cultural humility trainings for NIAID-funded clinical research staff, NAEHCR improved the individual capacities of collaborators. "At the core of this project is a structural community-level intervention that supports information and technology transfer in a reciprocal and purposeful way; thus improving knowledge, skill and cultural awareness among the clinical research staff and Native community members," said Damon Humes, Director of the Legacy Project and Co-Project Director of NAEHCR.

NAEHCR challenges the way research is currently conducted; which often negates community involvement in the initial and planning phases. It reminds the research enterprise that successful engagement requires community permission, support and an equitable distribution of resources. Specifically, that findings and results are shared and there are long-term plans that support sustained participation by researchers and community members alike to ensure institutional knowledge is not lost to staff attrition or time.

Robert Foley, President/CEO of NNAAPC and Co-Project Director of NAEHCR states, "By reconceptualizing and reconfiguring the manner in which researchers approach communities, we are hoping to affect a shift in both the mindset of researchers and community members alike. Both parties benefit from the research, therefore both parties should participate actively on the same level in the research process - as peers working towards the same goal - the health and wellness of the community."

The hope is that through this work, both the identified urban Native communities and the funded clinical research sites will have the increased skill set and resources to forge the trusting relationships that are needed when working with an under-resourced and over-researched population. It requires a paradigm shift – it is moving beyond just research protocols as a driving force, but interacting and engaging on a personal level to understand perceptions and perspectives around HIV, health, and research.

During the initial year, NAEHCR was able to work in Seattle and Denver to create and pilot a model of community engagement. During the second year of the project, engagement efforts will be expanded to include San Francisco and Chicago to refine the process.

"We are seeking to create a model, replicate it, and through its demonstrated effectiveness, bring it to other Researchers and Native communities. Ultimately, a model of respectful engagement such as this could be applied in diverse Native communities and applied to myriad health issues," says Matt Ignacio (Tohono O'odham), Project Manager at NNAAPC.

Now in Phase II of NAEHCR, the San Francisco and Chicago research and Native communities will provide the guidance and feedback necessary to refine the cultural humility training and engagement planning tools; thus strengthening the capacity building model. Both cities were selected based on the relative size of their Native communities, presence of NIAID-funded clinical research sites and local urban cultures that support activism, advocacy, and innovation. Both San Francisco and Chicago are also part of the Department of Health and Human Services' *Twelve Cities Project* - which is creating new programs and supplementing funding in order to fight the HIV epidemic in the twelve cities in the country with the highest prevalence of the disease.

As Matt Ignacio affirms, "Efforts are already underway to meet with research staff and community members in both cities to make them aware of the project, seek their permission to move forward, and invite them to participate in this groundbreaking effort."

About NNAAPC

The National Native American AIDS Prevention Center (NNAAPC), located in Denver, CO, is a non-profit organization founded in 1987 to address the impact of HIV/AIDS on American Indians, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians through culturally appropriate advocacy, research, education, and policy development in support of healthy Indigenous people. NNAAPC provides capacity building assistance to tribal and urban health organizations and communities, community-based organizations serving Native people, and agencies that administer federal HIV/AIDS policy. Over the last 25 years, NNAAPC has conducted work in community mobilization, training and technical assistance in HIV/AIDS prevention, intervention and case management, communications and media development, outreach and recruitment, developing technologies with HIV applications, and forging a policy agenda that ensures the inclusion of Native people. NNAAPC is the only national HIV/AIDS-specific Native organization in the United States.