

PUBLIC POLICY AND ADVOCACY
Legislative Update

Update on the APA Ethnic Minority Legislative Advocacy Agenda: September, 2005 – July, 2006

Annie Toro, JD, MPH, Karen Chen, PhD (SPSSI Scholar),
Diane Elmore, PhD and Ellen Garrison, PhD, APA PIPPO

APA's Public Interest Public Policy Office (PIPPO) staff is actively engaged in promoting psychology in the public interest in Congress and with the Bush administration. PIPPO activities include the preparation of legislative background materials, statutory provisions, and formal comments on proposed legislation and regulations, as well as training and mobilizing the APA membership for grassroots advocacy efforts. The office also identifies and invites psychologists to testify at congressional hearings and APA briefings, and to represent the association on federal agency advisory councils and at executive branch meetings. Additionally, PIPPO administers the APA Congressional Fellowship Program and a year long public policy internship program for psychology graduate students. The following are highlights of PIPPO activities since September 2005 in support of its ethnic minority legislative advocacy agenda.

- **Effects of Hurricane Katrina.** Following Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, PI-PPO was instrumental in drafting legislation to enhance relief and preparedness services for ethnic minorities and persons with limited English proficiency. In November, PI-PPO provided input to the office of Delegate Donna Christensen (D-Virgin Islands) regarding the Hurricane Katrina Recovery, Reclamation, Restoration, Reconstruction and Reunion Act, a bill introduced by Rep. Melvin Watt (D-NC). The bill includes provisions to address the needs of ethnic minority individuals impacted by the hurricanes. In March, PI-PPO assisted the office of Rep. Michael Honda (D-CA) in drafting a bill to ensure linguistically accessible services for those affected by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita.
- **Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities.** During the Congressional Black Caucus Legislative Conference in September, PI-PPO launched the National Coalition on Health and Behavior with the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) to advocate for the role of behavior in eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities. PI-PPO staff conducted outreach to potential coalition partners, including the Black Psychiatrists Caucus of the National Medical Association, and distributed the briefing paper, *"Support for Behavioral and Social Science Research Needed to Eliminate Health Disparities."* PI-PPO has since expanded the membership of the coalition and continues to work with congressional offices to advance health disparities legislation. In March, PPO sent a letter to all members of Congress urging increased funding for the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program for Fiscal Year (FY) 2007, which would help eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities.
- **Ethnic Minority Children.** In November, APA co-sponsored a congressional briefing on the mental health and resilience of ethnic minority children facing trauma and disaster with the Congressional Asian Pacific American Caucus, the Congressional

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Hispanic Caucus and the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) Health Braintrust. The diverse panel of presenters included: **Barbara Bonner, PhD** (University of Oklahoma Health Sciences Center), **Larke Huang, PhD** (American Institutes for Research), **Portia Hunt, PhD** (Temple University), **Alicia Lieberman, PhD** (National Child Traumatic Stress Network), and **Luis Vazquez, PhD** (New Mexico State University), with APA CEO **Norman Anderson, PhD**, serving as moderator. In September, PI-PPO helped arrange for **Rodney Hammond, PhD**, of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to speak on the subject of child abuse and the effects of Hurricane Katrina at the CBC Health Braintrust Legislative Weekend.

- **American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health.** In March, PI-PPO staff met with Indian Health Service Administrator Charles Grim, along with members of Friends of Indian Health, to discuss budget issues and concerns. Later that month, PI-PPO staff met with Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND), ranking member of the Indian Affairs Committee, along with congressional staff, American Indian leaders, and leaders of national health organizations, to discuss the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act. PI-PPO staff focused particularly on the growing mental and behavioral health concerns in Indian country (including substance abuse and suicide) and the need for professional mental health training. In April, PI-PPO staff sent letters to Senate Indian Affairs Committee Chair John McCain (R-AZ) and Sen. Dorgan in support of the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Amendments Act of 2005 (S. 1899) to remove barriers to reduce child abuse and to provide for appropriate intervention for child victims.
- **Indians into Psychology Program.** PI-PPO continues to work with stakeholders to encourage the inclusion of vital mental health language in the reauthorization of the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, and with Education-PPO to increase funding for the American Indians into Psychology (In Psych) Program. PPO staff contributed to the adoption of language that would increase the number of and funding for InPsych programs, as well as provide support for tele-mental health demonstration projects and research funding to examine the causes of youth suicide among American Indians and Alaska Natives. In March, PI-PPO met with staff of Senators Burns, Dorgan and Pete Domenici (R-NM), members of the Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies, to seek support for report language that includes an additional \$500,000 for the InPsych program. The Committee chair responded favorably to this request.
- **Minority Fellowship Program (MFP).** PI-PPO collaborated with Science PPO and APA's MFP Office in drafting report language in support of federal appropriations for ethnic minority research training, which was slated for a reduction at the National Institute of Mental Health. PI-PPO also drafted report language in support of an increase in funding for the Minority Fellowship Program administered by the

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Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). PI-PPO continues to work closely with Science-PPO and APA's MFP Office in a coordinated advocacy effort to recommend funding for both programs. In June, PI-PPO staff met with staff of Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-IL), who agreed to send a letter (drafted by PI-PPO) to SAMHSA Administrator Charles Curie in support of a \$5 million allocation for the MFP for FY 2007. The Minority Fellowship Program supports the training of ethnic minority mental health professionals and increases the accessibility of culturally competent mental health and substance abuse services for ethnically diverse populations.

For more detailed information on these and other initiatives, please visit the PPO Web site at: <http://www.apa.org/ppo/>.