



## NAPWA AIDS Watch in DC

AIDSWatch 2009 took place in Washington DC from April 27-29, 2009. AIDSWatch, a project of the National Association of People with AIDS (NAPWA), brought together over 350 AIDS advocates from across the country to speak with their elected officials in support of a strong federal commitment to HIV/AIDS Programs. AIDSWatch is the largest annual constituent-based federal HIV/AIDS advocacy and education event in the U.S. Participants included people living with HIV and AIDS, their families, friends, care providers, and other advocates.

This three-day event began with advocacy trainings and a rally on Monday March 27<sup>th</sup>. Bill McColl and Donna Crews from AIDS Action staff participated in the training session, which instructed advocates on the AIDS Watch policy platform and how to conduct Congressional visits. The opening day concluded with town hall session with Jeffrey Crowley, Director of the Office of National AIDS Policy. Crowley addressed AIDS Watch participants and noted that his top priority is the development of a National AIDS Strategy that will reduce new infections, increase access to care, and address health disparities. He then fielded several HIV policy related questions from the AIDS Watch crowd.

The training day was followed by two days of meetings with elected officials and Congressional briefings. On Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, BIENESTAR Human Services, Inc. held the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Congressional Briefing on Latinos and HIV/AIDS. Representative Lucille Roybal-Allard (D-CA) sponsored the briefing and gave opening remarks. Oscar De La O, President & CEO of BIENESTAR moderated the briefing. The annual briefing is designed to increase awareness of the crisis of HIV/AIDS among Latino communities in the U.S. and to update and educate Congressional offices on issues affecting Latinos and HIV/AIDS. Presenters were Jeffrey Crowley, Director of the Office of National AIDS Policy (ONAP), Carl Schmid, Director of Federal Affairs of The AIDS Institute, Frank Beadle De Palomo, Senior Vice President and Director of the Center on AIDS & Community Health of the Academy of Educational Development (AED), and Ravinia Hayes-Cozier, Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy of the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC). The presenters spoke on the need to address the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on Latinos through a National AIDS Strategy, the Minority AIDS Initiative, and critical prevention opportunities.

On Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup>, representatives from AIDS Watch and members of Congress held a joint briefing on the Early Treatment for HIV Act (ETHA). Robert Greenwald, from the Treatment Access Expansion Project, introduced the speakers and provided a brief history of ETHA. Representatives Elliot Engel (D-NY) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) both gave opening remarks, highlighting the specifics of ETHA and stressing the importance of bipartisan support of the bill. Scott Boule from Speaker Nancy Pelosi's (D-CA) office reiterated Congress' dedication to enacting comprehensive health care reform that addresses the needs of those living with HIV.