



## Director's Spotlight

By **January Contreras**, Acting Director, ADHS

I am very pleased to be a part of the second quarterly edition of the Arizona Health Disparities Center's newsletter *AHDConnection*. This newsletter is a wonderful opportunity for the Arizona Department of Health Services to share community stories, provide health disparities and cultural competency information and showcase best practices. This month is a busy and significant one for us in public health and behavioral health. In October, we highlight the importance of learning about diverse topics including mental health awareness, breast cancer, Hispanic heritage and health literacy. Across the country, and right here in Arizona, it is an optimal time to create awareness, host educational events and collaborate with community partners to highlight the health disparities and health inequities that exist among vulnerable and minority populations. As it stands, addressing health disparities has already been named as one of the priority goals of the Department. In order to help us achieve this goal for the public, the Department is in the process of developing a strategic plan that will put strategies and action into place. As we move forward, we will certainly be strengthening the strategic plan by bringing in more involvement from additional agency leaders and employees, as well as our critical community partners. I appreciate everyone's support and contributions as we strive to achieve health equity for all. ♦

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## Walking to Health

Imagine no cars, no school buses. Hundreds of school children lined up and walked on the sidewalks of the South Phoenix on a windy early morning in late Fall. Children wore walking shoes and their smiling faces reflected the sky. It was the International Walk to School Day, which was part of the City Of Phoenix Safe Routes to School Program to encourage safe ways for children to walk to school. The South Phoenix Healthy Kids Partnership has partnered with the Program to promote walking to school as a great way to exercise. Its staff was busy distributing information for kids and parents on healthy lifestyles, exercise and nutrition as well as active play gifts such as Frisbees and jump ropes to promote physical activity. "This was very good for the parents and kids, it reminds us that we can walk to school instead of dropping the kids off," said Lorena Tadas, a local resident who participated in the event. "Walking to school is a good time for parents and children to communicate and they exercise."



The South Phoenix Healthy Kids Partnership is a coalition of community agencies and local residents working together to address the childhood obesity epidemic (continued page 2)

Community Story

# Why Is Health Literacy? Why Is It Important?

By **Veronica Perez**, Advisor for Cultural Competency & Health Literacy, ADHS

In addition to many other health observances we celebrate, October is also **Health Literacy Month**. But what is *health literacy*? And why is it important for the public health community to address it?

Health literacy is our ability to read, write, *understand and use* information essential to managing our health. It affects nearly every aspect of our ability to understand and process information regarding health, like deciding how much cough syrup to give our child, what type of health plan we should choose, following the instructions for preparing for a medical procedure, or making our way to the hospital and navigating our way once we're there.

Some are more at risk for having low health literacy than others, such as non-native English speakers, people with low income levels, adults with less than a high school degree and older adults. But according to the National Assessment of Adult Literacy, only 12 percent of U.S. adults (continued page 4)

## Arizona

### Health Disparities Center

#### **Mission:**

To promote and protect the health and well being of the minority and vulnerable populations of Arizona by enhancing the capacity of the public health system to effectively serve minority populations and reduce health disparities.

#### **Vision:**

#### **Health equity for all**

We envision a state where each person has equal opportunity to prevent and overcome disease and live a longer, healthier life.

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## **Walking to Health** - continued from page 1

in the South Phoenix Area. The coalition was initiated in 2004 by the Mountain Park Health Center, a federally funded community health center serving the South Phoenix area.

In South Phoenix, 61.1 percent of the population is Hispanic, compared to 25 percent in Maricopa County. It is one of the poorest and most medically underserved communities in Arizona. U.S. Census data indicates that 29.9 percent of all residents live in poverty (compared to 11.7 percent in Maricopa County). The South Phoenix area also lacks sufficient health care providers. This lack of health care providers and the high poverty rate leads to predictably troubling health outcomes. Compounding this problem is the fact that an estimated 27.7 percent of all South Phoenix residents lack health insurance coverage. In addition, data suggests that children in South Phoenix are in the midst of an obesity epidemic. A 2003 survey of medical records at Mountain Park Health Center indicated that 25 percent of patients ages 6 – 19 years were overweight, compared to a national mean of 15.4 percent. The survey results also showed that although the majority of participants believed childhood obesity was a big problem in their community, education in the area about its consequences was needed.

The South Phoenix Healthy Kids Partnership is a product born of the community's passion and commitment. According to Valentina Hernandez, the Partnership's Childhood Obesity Program Coordinator, membership of the Partnership is diverse and includes medical offices, local health plans, the local YMCA, parent-teacher organizations, school districts, behavioral health provider agencies, public health agencies, the faith community, academic institutions, city government (parks and recreation), and many other individuals and

# Seasonal Illness, Health Beliefs and CLAS?

By **Jana L. Granillo**, Co-chair of AzPHA Health Disparities Section

## CLAS Standards

Seasonal Illness, Health Beliefs and CLAS? This sounds like a far stretch, when in fact “beliefs” is exactly what we need to know to understand our target populations and make a difference in the Public Health work that we do.

How we perceive the cause of illness, treatment and the decision to seek health care is indicative of cultural and health beliefs. Health beliefs are based on what has been passed down and/or acquired through life and is a part of our culture. Culture includes our beliefs and patterns of human behaviors to our beliefs and patterns of human behavior to include health.

I have asked the following question of the audiences in many workshops and presentations.

“What do you do when you feel a cold or the flu coming on?”

The answers range from using vapor rubs, getting rest and drinking fluids to using over the counter medications and more. The answers are the “health beliefs” of the participants.

Health beliefs encompass three factors:

- ▶ Source of illness
- ▶ How to treat illness
- ▶ Decisions to seek health care and from whom

My personal example passed down from my mother (who was born in the 1920s) is as follows:

- ▶ Source of illness: Cold weather and wet hair

will give you a chill and a cold or flu. (Not a virus or any other source.)

▶ Treatment: Rest, drink tea with lemon, honey and whiskey; stay warm. (Age and whiskey were not a factor.)

▶ Seeking health care: If home remedies did not work, call the pharmacist because they offer free advise and are close enough to a doctor. Maybe take a friend’s prescribed medication, after all, it worked for them. Seek out a doctor only if the home remedies do not work. Follow the advice only if it is affordable to the family unit and does

not compromise their welfare.

There are lots of beliefs, lots of cultures, lots of people. People have different beliefs about:

- Blood or blood products
- Diet
- Medicine
- Spiritual healing
- Health rituals

- Home remedies

It is important to know that we cannot make assumptions about behavior or beliefs based on ourselves. Knowing about health beliefs will help in our work in areas like treatment, prevention and social marketing.

For more information about health beliefs, I encourage you to visit the following website <http://xculture.org/Publications.php>, the Cross Cultural Health Care Program, where multiple ethnic groups have been researched on their health beliefs and more. ♦



Keeping your body healthy is an expression of gratitude to the whole cosmos — the tree, the clouds, everything.

— **Thich Nhat Hanh**

## What is Health Literacy? Why Is It Important? - Continued from Page 2

can be considered “proficient” in health literacy. Those who are not proficient are more likely to lack health insurance, report poor health, have higher rates of hospitalization and use preventive services less frequently.

Education, language, culture, access to resources and age are all factors that affect a person’s health literacy skills. Adults are expected to gather and use health information from media sources as diverse as food and medicine labels to scientific literature, to understand topics ranging from fat grams to medication instructions and to use high-level reading and analytical skills in locations ranging from the grocery store to the hospital. These are not easy demands to meet.

So what can we do to help improve health literacy? One strategy is to use *plain language* in the development of materials and messaging. Plain language is clear language writing that is easier to read and understand. It is not merely lowering the reading level or “dumbing down” concepts. A plain language document is one in which people can find what they need and don’t have to struggle to understand a message. Even an expert doesn’t want to work to understand a document or message. This is a strategy currently being implemented within ADHS, in partnership with the Social Marketing Committee and the Arizona Health Disparities Center.

To learn more about how to write in plain language, visit <http://www.plainlanguage.gov>, or contact Veronica Perez at (602) 542-6349 or [veronica.perez@azdhs.gov](mailto:veronica.perez@azdhs.gov). ♦

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### Walking to Health - continued from page 2

inter-disciplinary approach to asset management and problem solving. Ms. Hernandez said that new members are recruited continuously to stimulate fresh ideas and maintain enthusiasm.

A broad-based approach is taken by the Healthy Kids Partnership toward addressing childhood obesity that includes behavior change programming, systems development and policy change. The behavioral change programs have included intensive workshops for overweight children, nutrition education presentations in local schools, parental education workshops and promotion of walking to the school bus activities. These types of activities have been augmented with promotion of healthy menus in local restaurants, participation in “safe routes to school” environmental changes and systems changes such as the establishment of an obesity management program in the Mountain Park Health Center Pediatrics Department.



The Healthy Kids Partnership was one of 23 community groups invited to “Community Approaches to Address Obesity” in 2008 at the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta and provided CDD with recommendations on community approaches to addressing obesity nationwide.

Ms. Hernandez shared that the program is currently working on a programmatic and policy level to improve the health of children residing in South Phoenix. ♦

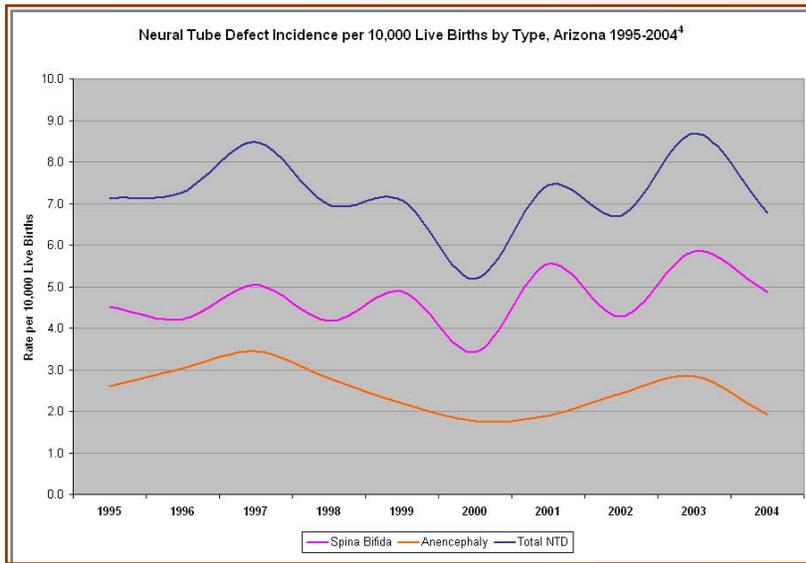
## Data Speak

# Neural Tube Defects and Folic Acid

In the United States, about 2,500 pregnancies are affected by a birth defect of the spine (spina bifida) or brain (anencephaly), also known as neural tube defects (NTDs) each year.<sup>1</sup>

and experiencing high fevers in early pregnancy.<sup>1</sup>

Up to 70 percent of all NTDs can be prevented among women ages 15-45 who consume the recommended amount of 400 micrograms (mcg) of folic acid before and during pregnancy.<sup>2</sup> Folic acid is a B vitamin (B9) and is found mostly in leafy green vegetables, orange juice, enriched grains and multivitamins.<sup>2,3</sup> It is recommended that all women ages 15-45 should take a multivitamin with 400 mcg of folic acid. To ensure your multivitamin contains folic acid, check the label. It's that easy!



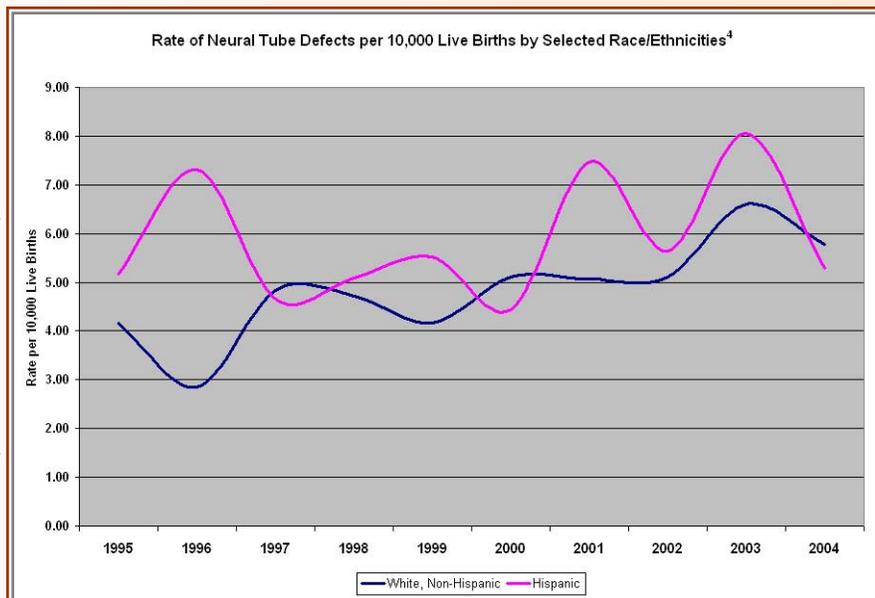
Even if you don't plan to become pregnant, take a multivitamin with 400 mcg of folic acid every day! This will help you prevent brain and spine birth defects in your baby if you ever become a mom. ♦

### References:

1. Boulet et al. unpublished;
2. CDC, <http://www.cdc.gov/> ;
3. March of Dimes: <http://www.marchofdimes.com/>
4. Arizona Department of Health Services

Latinas have a risk 1.5 to 3 times higher than non-Hispanic white women of having a child affected by these birth defects.<sup>2</sup> On average, 95 babies per year are born with NTDs in Arizona.<sup>3</sup> Of these, 95 babies with NTDs, about 48 or more cases are related to the lack of folic acid.<sup>3</sup>

Risk factors to have a baby with a NTD include women with a previous NTD-affected pregnancy, Latina/Hispanic ancestry, being of lower socio-economic status, having diabetes, being obese, taking anti-seizure medication



## Buzz

### Funding Opportunities:

#### [AZ Women's Partnership: 2009 Grant Program](#)

*Deadline:* January 31, 2009

*Grant awards range:* \$500 - \$ 2,000

#### [DHHS, Office of Refugee Resettlement: Standing Announcement for the Ethnic Community Self-help Program](#)

*Deadline:* February 24, 2009 and 2010

*Award Amount:* 8 awards, up to \$600,000

### Publications of Interests:

#### [Arizona Health Guide: Resources for the Uninsured](#)



### ADHS Employees Celebrated Hispanic Culture and Tradition

On Wednesday, October 15, the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) hosted the second annual Hispanic Heritage Month Celebration. The Celebration featured speakers and artists from the community emphasizing this year's theme: "La Cultura Cura," the culture cure, which promoted public health through art and culture. Local artist and performer Zarco Guerrero shared insights into bridging public health messages to the Hispanic community. In addition, Maria Gonzales and Domingo Rosa demonstrated how their programs of traditional and modern Hispanic dances worked with school children to promote physical activity and wellness. Meanwhile, Dee Logan from the Farmers Market emphasized the importance of working with communities to promote nutritional education through cultural foods and concepts. The ADHS Acting Director January Contreras, Deputy Director Will Humble, the Health Advisor for the Governor Gina Flores and others gave speeches to the audience. ♦

It is a resource for Arizona residents who are uninsured or underinsured that helps to connect them to affordable health care resources throughout the state in both English and Spanish.

#### [Community Health Worker's Sourcebook: A Training Manual for Prevention Heart Disease and Stroke](#)

It contains information and activities on heart disease and stroke and on the major risk factors for these diseases in adults. It also contains information on risk factors that begin in childhood.

### Events of Interest:

#### [From Head to Toe – Conferencia Educational Conference](#)

*Date:* November 15, 2008

*Time:* 8:30 am to 2:00 pm

*Location:* South Mountain Community College, 7050 S. 24<sup>th</sup> Street, Phoenix, AZ 85042

*Contact:* 602-861-4731 X 7091

#### [NIH Summit: The Science of Eliminating Health Disparities](#)

*Dates:* December 16-18, 2008

*Location:* Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center, National Harbor, MD

For more information about funding opportunities, publications of interest and events of interest, please visit <http://www.azminorityhealth.gov>. ♦

### Editor's Note:

The *AHDConnection* is published quarterly on January 31, April 30, July 31 and October 31. We are looking for community stories and other leads that are related to efforts to reduce health disparities in Arizona. Because of space limitation, each community story should not be more than 500 words. Ideas for community stories are also welcome. Our deadline is the 15th of month prior to the publication date. Please email articles or ideas to the editor at [hong.chartrand@azdhs.gov](mailto:hong.chartrand@azdhs.gov).

We would like to get feedback, suggestions, ideas, news or events from you as well. Thank you very much. ♦

