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**WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA AIDS PROJECT RECEIVES GRANT TO ADDRESS
TROUBLING HIV/AIDS CRISIS IN THE SOUTH**

Asheville, NC 3/7/08 -- A \$37,000 grant has been awarded to the Western North Carolina AIDS Project (WNCAP) by the National AIDS Fund. WNCAP is one of 30 agencies across nine southern states awarded a grant through the NAF's Southern REACH initiative, a response to what the grantmakers have termed "a troubling shift" in the nature of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the South.

The South has some of the highest AIDS case rates in the country. From 2000 – 2003, new AIDS cases increased 35.8% in the six states of the Deep South (AL, GA, LA, MS, NC, SC) compared to 5.2% in all other states combined. Poverty, unemployment, and unequal access to education and health care are all contributors to the growing disease burden in the South, not just for HIV/AIDS but across many health areas.

For similar reasons the impact of HIV/AIDS on African Americans in the South has been devastating. In 2006 the rate of infection for African Americans in North Carolina was more than eight times greater than for Whites. The disparity is even greater among women, with a rate of HIV infection among African American women almost 17 times higher than that of White women.

"Despite significant advances in HIV prevention and care, there is still a lot that needs to be done to help those who are often left out of the public health dialog," said Ron Curran, Executive Director of the Western North Carolina AIDS Project.

WNCAP was chosen to receive the award based on the agency's strong track record of providing HIV-related services to residents of Western North Carolina. Grant funds are intended to strengthen the agency's ability to address HIV/AIDS among marginalized, at-risk and underserved populations.

WNCAP currently serves over 340 individuals who are living with HIV/AIDS, and provides HIV prevention education and outreach to thousands more each year in seventeen counties across the region. The agency was established in 1986.

Southern REACH, which stands for Regional Expansion of Access and Capacity to Address HIV/AIDS, is a grantmaking initiative of the National AIDS Fund, made possible with support from the Ford Foundation and the Elton John AIDS Foundation.

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