“Community Health Workers Advocating for Change” to be Presented at the 20th Annual Western Migrant Stream Forum in Oakland, CA on February 16-18, 2011

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Tucson, Ariz.—Maia Ingram, Deputy Director of the Arizona Prevention Research Center (AzPRC) at the University of Arizona Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health and Floribella Redondo, Co-Chair of the AzPRC’s Community Action Board will be presenting at the 20th Annual Western Migrant Stream Forum in Oakland, California February 16-18, 2011. Community health workers are recognized as representatives for their communities and a powerful voice through which community priorities can be shared with decision makers. This presentation will highlight findings of a national study documenting current CHW community advocacy activity and provide an opportunity for discussion on the feasibility of integrating community advocacy as a formal CHW role in organizations serving farmworkers.

The importance of Community Health Workers (CHWs) as outreach workers, health educators, and patient navigators is increasingly recognized within the health care field. As CHWs become integrated into the health care delivery system, the measure of CHW effectiveness has become focused on individual behavior change and individual health outcomes. Historically, CHWs have an additional and vital role of representing their communities in the health care system, giving voice to community needs and priorities, and often serving as community advocates or organizers, bringing community members together to address common issues. As a means to bring about environmental and systems change, CHW community advocacy has the potential to be a major force in addressing social determinants of health and health disparities. CHW organizations are pivotal in encouraging CHW community advocacy through both the work environment and advocacy training. The AzPRC conducted an online, cross sectional survey designed to document and describe current CHW community advocacy activities. The survey yielded 332 responses from CHWs in 22 states. The majority of respondents worked in either clinical or grassroots settings. Advocacy was reported as a major CHW activity with two-thirds of respondents reporting formal advocacy training and more than half reporting that community advocacy was part of their job description. This presentation explores the types of community advocacy activities CHWs are engaged in and identifies characteristics of the workplace that are related to community advocacy. Participants will discuss the feasibility for community advocacy to be integrated within the formal role of CHWs in organizations providing health services to farmworker communities.

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The mission of the Arizona Prevention Research Center (Center) is to partner with communities to improve the health and well-being of people living in the U.S.-Mexico Border states through research, training, advocacy and policy change. The Center houses diverse programs and activities that use community-based participatory action research to focus on the prevention of chronic disease in the border region. The Community Action Board (CAB) represents a group of organizations along the Southern Arizona border with Mexico that serves as an advisory body to the Center. The philosophy of the Center is that improving health outcomes requires a collaborative partnership between universities and communities.

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