

**Councilman**  
**TONY CARDENAS**  
6<sup>th</sup> Council District



***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***  
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**ALARMING REPORT PROMPTS COUNCILMAN TO SEEK**  
**FUNDING FOR AIDS OUTREACH PROGRAM**

***Gang Members 'Misperceptions' of HIV Putting Partners and Families at Risk***

**Los Angeles-** Councilman Tony Cardenas, Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee on Gang Violence and Youth Development, and the city's AIDS Coordinator's Office held a press conference entitled "Gangs and a Perilous Attitude Towards AIDS" in response to an alarming study involving 300 gang members. The pilot study alarmed Cardenas who said gang members' "misperceptions" put their partners and families at risk for contracting HIV and AIDS. Citing the statistics, Cardenas introduced a motion, asking the city to look at possible funding opportunities for an outreach program.

"Like a deadly bullet, a gang member's ignorance and macho attitude towards AIDS is putting lives at risk, including the lives of their own family members," said Cardenas. "They are playing Russian Roulette with their families."

26% of gang members questioned in the study said it didn't matter if they contracted the disease because they "will probably die young anyway." 33% agreed with the statement, "I'm very healthy so my body can fight off an HIV infection." 37% surveyed said they don't have to worry about HIV/AIDS because they aren't gay and about 90% reported inconsistent condom use.

"The study shows both high-risk sexual behavior and rampant drug use, coupled with misinformation about the epidemic," said city AIDS Coordinator Stephen David Simon. "If unchecked, this may lead to a new band of infections."

With a gang population upwards of 39,000 in the City of Los Angeles and approximately 100,000 in the county, these attitudes are putting a large number of non-members in jeopardy. The report goes beyond individual risks and addresses how these attitudes may affect families. Fortunately, it appears gang members are interested in further education with 91% of respondents agreeing there should be more public information about HIV.

"The gang members overwhelmingly expressed the need for more public information about HIV," said Wendy Schwartz, Senior Policy Staffer, AIDS Coordinators Office. "This challenges us to develop more effective HIV prevention at the street level."

Out of the 300 participants of the study, 144 were tested for HIV. While all those tests were negative, researchers say the small sample of this gang population may not accurately reflect HIV prevalence in the larger group and participants that feared a positive result may have been reluctant to be tested.

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