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El Pueblo, Inc. Launches New Demonstration Project to Reduce Impaired Driving Fatalities and Injuries within the North Carolina Hispanic Community

(Raleigh, NC) – Alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for Hispanics in North Carolina; more than 20 percent compared to only 2.2 percent for Whites and 2.4 for African Americans. The main factor contributing to this disproportionately high number of traffic fatalities and injuries seems to be the lack of knowledge among Hispanic drivers in NC of State traffic or DWI laws, of highway safety issues, and of the serious consequences of impaired driving. This is sometimes compounded by language and cultural barriers, and a lack of bilingual service providers and educational materials.

To help gain more knowledge on this situation, El Pueblo, Inc. in collaboration with North Carolina's Governor's Highway Safety Program and State Highway Patrol launched a project entitled "Demonstration and Evaluation of Strategies to Reduce Impaired Driving Fatalities and Injuries within Hispanic Populations. The 30-month project, which is funded by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), includes as a component a communications campaign with the slogan: *¿Manejar borracho? ¡No seas tonto muchacho!*

Recent efforts to reduce impaired driving in the general population have focused especially on high-visibility enforcement backed by publicity. Research has demonstrated that such efforts have the potential to reduce alcohol-related fatalities by as much as 20 percent. But this approach has not been fully evaluated in Hispanic populations. Furthermore, the implementation of this approach in Hispanic communities has not been sufficiently studied to determine whether this strategy is effective as it is, or needs to be adapted in light of language and cultural differences.

The project will study three geographical areas. In the Charlotte-Mecklenburg area, the project will monitor statistics on DWI and alcohol-related arrests and crashes. In the other two areas, Triad (Winston-Salem, Greensboro and High Point) and Triangle (Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill), it will conduct a mass-media campaign aimed at DWI reduction, in addition to maintaining statistics of arrests and crash data. The Triangle will be different from the other sites in that police will conduct high-visibility enforcement in that area.

One of the goals of the project is to determine the most effective approach to deter Hispanics from driving impaired, whether it is social-marketing campaigns focused on the effects that drinking and driving has on the family of the driver, or publicized high-visibility enforcement efforts. The project also seeks to demonstrate effective strategies within high-visibility enforcement, communications and education; and in the process to develop as well culturally-relevant Spanish messaging, all aimed at reducing impaired driving death and injuries in the Hispanic community. In doing so, it hopes to raise awareness of the high costs of a DWI conviction in financial and emotional terms.

Unlike Hispanics in many regions of U.S., the North Carolina Latino population is composed mostly of first generation immigrants, many of whom have come to the State in the past decade. Tony Asion, Public Safety Director of the non-profit organization El Pueblo, Inc., stated: "Through a well-designed and implemented study, the overall goal of El Pueblo is to create a toolkit of 'Best Practices' which can be used in similar States and metropolitan areas that also face the challenge of providing services to the Spanish-speaking community, while working with limited resources."

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