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REACH US Coalition Center of Excellence

CONNECTICUT HEALTH EQUITY WEEK STATEMENT

My name is Theanvy Kuoch and I am the Executive Director of Khmer Health Advocates, a Cambodian American health organization that has been serving survivors of the Cambodian holocaust since 1982. My community lost 2.25 to 3 million people to genocide over a period of 4 years. More than 4,000 survivors of this holocaust and their families are living in Connecticut. It is not surprising that our survivors have health problems that are chronic and life threatening. Over 62% of Cambodian adults are suffering from depression or PTSD and they are dying of diabetes six times more often than the general population and 3 times more often from stroke. Both of these conditions are preventable or manageable.

For Cambodian Americans living in Connecticut, health disparities are a continuation of genocide. People who are ill because of sickness that was caused by the starvation and conditions under the Khmer Rouge will die of these conditions without appropriate care. This is a very personal issue for me because 19 members of my family died and it is very painful to watch my community die of illnesses that are manageable.

Today, we have the tools and knowledge to prevent these deaths. Telemedicine and health information technology offers the opportunity to provide culturally and linguistically appropriate care for a fraction of what it would cost 10 years ago. We have electronic medical records, spoken format assessments and electronic chronic disease management and telemedicine that can bring specialists from all over the country to Connecticut.

We have the knowledge that makes it clear that treating depression can greatly reduce poor outcomes for diabetes and cardiovascular disease. We know that lifestyle changes can save lives. In Connecticut, as many as 1000 Cambodian survivors are suffering from PTSD or depression. Treating these conditions with culturally and language appropriate care can save over \$1 million dollars a year in health care costs.

We have the knowledge and the technology to ease suffering and improve the quality of life for every person in Connecticut, but we need the will, the compassion and the wisdom to make this happen.

Khmer Health Advocates is Center of Excellence for Ending Disparities in Health and part of the Racial and Ethnic Approach to Ending Disparities in Health, a project of the Centers for Disease Control.