

# Hartford groups get \$900,000 for AIDS fight

By ERIC LIPTON  
*Courant Staff Writer*

Five Hartford organizations committed to fighting AIDS in the city's minority community have won a \$900,000 federal grant to strengthen their efforts over the next three years.

Instead of just passing out AIDS-prevention pamphlets or condoms to people at risk of getting AIDS, the agencies will use the money to work intensively with targeted high-risk people.

Case managers at the Urban League of Greater Hartford and Latinos/as Contra SIDA will encourage these people to make changes in their lifestyles — such as finding new housing, ending a drug problem or altering sexual habits — in order to avoid the deadly disease, said

Richard J. Gruber, health and human services director at the Urban League.

The focus will be on drug addicts waiting for a spot in a drug-treatment program or those who have recently completed one. High-risk people recently released from jail would also be assigned a case manager, Gruber said.

Typically, case managers are assigned to people once they have tested positive for the virus that causes AIDS, Gruber said. But research has shown that if the city wants to slow the epidemic, it must take a more aggressive approach.

"It is directed to people who are ready to make a lifestyle change, but are vulnerable and need help doing it," he said.

The three other agencies will use the money to hire health educators who will reach out in a more general way to high-risk groups who have not previously received enough attention, such as women who are sexual partners of intravenous drug users, said Candida Flores, executive director of the Hispanic Health Council, one of the agencies. The other two organizations are the Institute for Community Research and the Hartford Dispensary, a drug-treatment center.

Women, who make up 25 percent of the city's reported AIDS cases, need to be approached differently on ways to avoid the disease, Flores said. For example, educators must teach high-risk women to overcome the sometimes submissive role they play in sexual relations so they have enough courage to ensure that their partners take precautions to avoid AIDS, she said. Child care also must be provided during counseling ses-

sions for women.

Hartford has the second-highest number of AIDS cases and deaths in the state. About 300 city residents have reportedly died of AIDS since 1981, and 513 have been diagnosed 60 of them this year, state statistics show. With the \$298,576-a-year grant, seven people will be hired.

"There has not been enough money put into prevention for these target populations," said Margaret Weeks of the Institute for Community Research.

The Hartford Health Department is involved in the association that applied for the grant, the Community Alliance for AIDS Programs. But it is not getting any of the money, as it is trying to shift the responsibility for AIDS outreach services to community-based groups.

The health department's outreach program was recently harshly criticized by the Centers for Disease Control as being poorly organized and supervised, resulting in the suspension of an \$83,076 grant.