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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Press Conference: Monday Nov 15, 2010
Free to Soar: Preventing and Treating Substance Abuse in Our Community

Chicago, IL-- The Asian Health Coalition (AHC) is taking steps to address substance abuse issues in Chicago's Chinatown communities in Armour Square and Bridgeport. A bold, multi-strategy effort is being launched to increase awareness, prevent substance abuse, and remove the cultural and linguistic barriers to seeking treatment.

The campaign is receiving key support from local government agencies. Speaking at a press conference from the Chinese American Service League (CASL) on Monday, November 15th, were Grace Hou, Assistant Secretary for the Illinois Department of Human Services, and Dr. Bechara Choucair, Commissioner for the Chicago Department of Public Health. Both officials highlighted critical community initiatives underway to prevent and decrease alcohol and tobacco use in Chicago's Chinatown area, and dispel the stigma around seeking substance abuse treatment.

Substance abuse continues to be a major public health concern in Chicago's Chinese American community. Recent findings from 2008 revealed that 31% of adult Chinese males in the community are smokers. More than 50% of 12th graders surveyed consumed alcohol and 15% smoked cigarettes in the past month. In collaboration with CASL, AHC has formed the Coalition for Asian Substance Abuse Prevention (CASAP) which includes local community leaders, law enforcement, businesses, youth, parents, and schools in the Chinatown neighborhood. CASAP is developing a high impact and culturally appropriate public education and media campaign, along with conducting law enforcement strategies and increasing advocacy actions for changing local alcohol and tobacco-related policies.

The Chinatown community is also committed to making local resources, tools and information visible to its members to eliminate the negative attitudes to seeking treatment. A first-ever Chinese-language smoking cessation program in Chicago is being offered at CASL in the spring of 2011 for individuals who want to quit smoking. Furthermore, bilingual Chinese substance abuse counselors are now available to individuals through a partnership with the Henry Booth House, a social services organization located in the vicinity of Chicago's south loop.

Anyone seeking further information is requested to contact Mona El-Shamaa or Meme Wang from the Asian Health Coalition at 312-372-7070.