

## LALES Investigator Speaks at *Vision Health Disparities Research Briefing*

On August 9, the National Eye Institute (NEI) released the results of the Los Angeles Latino Eye Study (LALES), the largest, most comprehensive epidemiological analysis of visual impairment in Latinos conducted in the United States. Co-sponsored by the National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities (NCMHD) and Research to Prevent Blindness (RPB), the study showed that Latinos had high rates of low vision, open-angle glaucoma and diabetic retinopathy. Full study results appeared in the June, July and August 2004 issues of the journal *Ophthalmology*.

On September 8, LALES Principal Investigator Dr. Rohit Varma (Doheny Eye Institute) was joined by Dr. Mildred Olivier (Midwest Glaucoma Center, P.C.) in an AEVR Capitol Hill Briefing on *Vision Health Disparities Research*, attended by more than 70 Congress-

sional staff. "Prevalence rates of visual impairment in Latinos are higher than those reported in Whites and comparable to those reported in African Americans," said Varma, who added that "given that Latinos are the fastest growing segment of the US population, we are facing a significant increase in the burden of eye disease as the population ages." He also noted that one in five individuals with diabetes was newly diagnosed during the LALES clinical exam, and 25 percent of these were found to have diabetic retinopathy. Overall, almost half of all Latinos with diabetes had diabetic retinopathy. Acknowledging that African Americans are three times as likely to have glaucoma as Whites, Dr. Olivier reported that the African American subset analysis of the Ocular Hypertension Treatment Study (OHTS, also sponsored by the NEI) found that daily pressure-lowering eye drops

reduced the development of primary open-angle glaucoma in African Americans by almost 50 percent. "The OHTS study is not only important because it confirmed that the risk for developing glaucoma is higher in African Americans," said Olivier, "it was also the first study to recruit large numbers of African Americans to examine the benefit of eye drops to delay or prevent its onset."



Dr. Olivier discusses the OHTS study before a standing room-only audience

In opening comments, James Jorkasky thanked the Congressional Hispanic Caucus for sending a "Dear Colleague" letter to all Hill offices supporting the event.



Left to right: AEVR Executive Director James Jorkasky; Saúl Peña of Cong. Ciro Rodriguez's (D-CA) office; Jennifer Grodsky of Cong. Hilda Solis' (D-CA) office and Dr. Rohit Varma