

H E A L T H

Eliminating Health Disparities: An NAACP Strategic Priority

Elimination of disparities in accessibility to quality health care services by African-Americans and other minority groups is central to the work of the Brooklyn Branch. The Health Committee of the Brooklyn Branch:

- advocates for universal health insurance and access to appropriate health care for all;
- campaigns for equal access to health education, care and treatment;
- sponsors events, such as health forums, that highlight issues of importance to people of color;
- promotes equal representation of African-Americans and other minorities within the health professions;
- advances increased research funding on African-American health issues; and
- supports health initiatives of the national NAACP.

The Health of African-Americans

Despite a health care system in the United States that is one of the best in the world, African-Americans and people of color bear a disproportionate burden of disease, injury, death and disability. Research shows that race and ethnicity correlate with persistent and, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), often increasing health disparities.

The NAACP has been at the forefront of efforts to erase disparities in the health care system. At its 97th national convention, held in July 2006, the NAACP declared HIV/AIDS an emergency. The organization also identified cancer prevention, obesity reduction, and promotion of physical fitness as areas for intensified action. Health statistics for African-Americans are daunting, requiring immediate action.

Cancer

Cancer is the second leading cause of death in the United States, resulting in more than 500,000 deaths each year. According to the CDC, the death rate for all cancers is 30 percent higher for African-Americans than for Whites. For example, African-American men are twice as likely to die from prostate cancer than Whites, and African-American women have a higher death rate from breast and cervical cancer. Cancer prevention efforts are critical. The Health Committee of the Brooklyn Branch will work with partners to promote cancer research, and conduct health seminars to improve early cancer detection. Seminars will also educate individuals about cancer prevention and treatment.

Cardiovascular Disease

Cardiovascular disease (CVD), or disease of the blood vessels and heart, causes more deaths in the United States than any other disease. It is manifested in strokes and heart attacks. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, minority and low-income groups have a disproportionate burden of death and disability from CVD. In particular, African-American women face a high and increasing risk of death from heart disease. Among risk factors for heart disease are high blood pressure, high cholesterol, smoking, obesity, and physical inactivity. The Health Committee of the Brooklyn Branch will be embarking on an aggressive campaign to promote cardiovascular disease prevention and treatment.

Diabetes

More than 17 million Americans have diabetes, and some 200,000 people die each year of related complications. Diabetes is a group of diseases characterized by high levels of glucose in the blood. The disease can cause serious complications, severe disabilities, and premature death. African-Americans are twice as likely to have diabetes, compared to Whites. According to the Diabetes Education Program, 3.2 million, or more than 13 percent, of African-Americans 20 years and older have diabetes. People with diabetes are two to four times more likely to have heart disease or suffer a stroke than people without diabetes. Approximately 73 percent of individuals with diabetes also have high blood pressure.



Research shows that type two, or adult diabetes, can be delayed or prevented with adoption of regular physical activity, weight loss and practicing healthy life choices by those susceptible to the disease. The Brooklyn Branch will be working with partners to educate individuals about risk factors associated with diabetes, how its onset can be delayed and prevented, and effective treatment and management of the disease.

HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS is a health emergency in the African-American Community. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Blacks, who are approximately 13 percent of the U.S. population, represent half of the more than one million Americans living with HIV. Additionally, between 2000 and 2003, Blacks accounted for 69 percent of new diagnoses among women, with an infection rate 18 times higher than White women. And among teens, it is reported that Blacks represent more than 56 percent of new infections. African-American and Hispanic children account for more than 80 percent of pediatric AIDS. Furthermore, according to statistics from the National Center for HIV, STD, and TB Prevention, while HIV/AIDS is the 14th leading cause of death for the total population, it is the leading cause of death for African-American men aged 35 to 44 years. The Brooklyn Branch is committed to working with other organizations to educate individuals about HIV/AIDS, and to promote HIV screening, early diagnosis and treatment.

High Blood Pressure

High blood pressure or hypertension, know as the “silent killer,” has a devastating effect on the African-American community. Statistics indicate that African-Americans are most likely to develop high blood pressure than any other racial or ethnic group. Individuals with high blood pressure are at increased risk of having a heart attack, heart failure, stroke, kidney disease, and other life-threatening illnesses. It is the major reason why African-Americans are eight times more likely to develop kidney disease than Whites. It is also a major reason why African-Americans die at an earlier age. The Brooklyn Branch continues to work with partners to educate individuals about high blood pressure prevention, control and treatment.

Obesity

Obesity is a national epidemic in the United States. Reports indicate that some 300,000 deaths each year in the U.S. are associated with overweight and obesity. African-Americans and other minorities are disproportionately affected by obesity. According to the National Women’s Health Center of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, an alarming three out of four African-American women are overweight or obese. Obesity is deadly. Research shows that overweight and obesity increase the risk of developing serious and disabling medical conditions, including heart disease, stroke, cancer, high blood pressure and arthritis. The Health Committee of the Brooklyn Branch will be working with partners to initiate research studies, develop strategies, and heighten awareness about the deadly consequences of overweight and obesity.

NAACP Health Programs and Initiatives

Among health programs already underway is the *NAACP Fitness Challenge*, which supports activities to promote preventive health care and physical fitness.

The NAACP has partnered with Hilton Publishing to create and launch *Kick the Habit*. *Kick the Habit* is an interactive smoking cessation plan. It is designed to educate minority communities about the dangers of smoking. The plan also includes a five-step program to help smokers quit, and a journal to record progress. Some 45,000 African-Americans die each year because of smoking-related illnesses.

Additionally, the Health Department of the NAACP is partnering with the National Women’s Law Center to protect and help expand Medicaid coverage, wherever possible. The Brooklyn Branch of the NAACP in 2006 held one of the largest Medicare Part D forums in the country. The forum, held in April 2006, provided individuals with counseling and assisted with enrollment in the Medicare Part D Prescription and Drug Benefit Program.

A Call for Support

The NAACP and the Brooklyn Branch will continue the relentless fight to erase health disparities in our country. We call for your support, and urge you to join our efforts, because the health of individuals determines the growth, economic prospects and survival of families and communities.

**MEMBERSHIP IS OUR LIFEBLOOD!
JOIN ... GIVE ... DO MORE!**

