



NAACP PRESS RELEASE

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COMPLACENCY IS NOT AN OPTION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV/AIDS IN THE AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Seventy percent of HIV-positive people in America are not receiving proper treatment and care—most of them are African American. Seventy-two African Americans are infected with HIV every day. The vast majority do not know they are infected.

According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) the rate of AIDS diagnoses for black adults and adolescents in 2005 was 10 times the rate for whites and nearly 3 times the rate for Hispanics. And after 26 years, the U.S. still has no overall strategy guiding its response to the domestic HIV/AIDS epidemic. Immediate personal and policy actions are necessary to change those alarming trends, NAACP officials said in marking World AIDS Day 2007.

Established by the World Health Organization in 1988, World AIDS Day, observed annually on Dec. 1, serves to focus global attention on the devastating impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic that disproportionately impacts blacks above all other groups. African Americans must unify to eradicate the spread of HIV/AIDS and advocate for policies that assist those most impacted.

Blacks are less likely to be screened for HIV, more likely to become infected, less likely to get treatment and more likely to die from AIDS.

“Black America must eliminate the homophobia from our culture that is perhaps the single greatest barrier to our ability to talk about AIDS,” said NAACP Chairman Julian Bond. “Black America cannot expect others to come to our aid until we commit to help ourselves. Many will continue to perish unless we commit to mobilize into a unified and mighty voice to transform this tragedy.”

Black Americans now account for 50 percent of new annual HIV infections and 50 percent of those living with HIV/AIDS in the United States. The rate of AIDS diagnoses for black women was nearly 23 times the rate for white women. The rate of AIDS diagnoses for black men was 8 times the rate for white men and black teens make up two-thirds of new infections in their age group, the latest figures from the CDC note. Once positive, African Americans are seven times more likely to die from the virus than whites.

“It is vitally important for us to take hold of this issue and act,” said Willis Edwards, NAACP National Board member and vice chair of the HIV/AIDS subcommittee of the

NAACP Health Committee. "Everyone in the African American community must be educated and get tested, no matter who they are or what they think so we can combat the spread of this disease in our community. We call on all leaders in this country, churches and activists to come together to stand up against this virus that is killing us in our silence and complacency."

Edwards will join other HIV/AIDS activists at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion in Los Angeles tomorrow to participate in a balloon release ceremony in honor of those who have died battling the disease. The lighting of a candle and prayers are also encouraged to recall those lost to the disease and mark the significance of the day.

There has been incremental progress in the battle against HIV/AIDS in the Black community where meaningful action has been taken. *The Way Forward: the State of AIDS in Black America*, a 2006 report compiled by the Black AIDS Institute with support from the NAACP, found an average annual decrease of 5 percent in new infections among African Americans between 2000 and 2004. That trend was driven in significant part by New York City's success in lowering infections among injecting drug users.

New infections dropped 6 percent among Black women between 2000 and 2003, driven by prevention programs that encourage open, honest dialogue about sexual health. Black women, however, continue to represent two-thirds of all female AIDS cases.

By spreading the message that AIDS remains a significant threat through marches, educational films, reports, HIV/AIDS education and training by an array of African American leaders, the NAACP has challenged itself to break the silence surrounding HIV/AIDS in the African American community.

The NAACP has established numerous resolutions and advocacy policies regarding HIV/AIDS in the United States. NAACP leaders set the tone in continuing that effort by publicly screening for HIV at the start of the Association's 2006 annual convention.

Since 1997 the NAACP has passed several resolutions that call for eliminating racial disparities in our nation's approach to the AIDS epidemic in order to abolish the disproportionate incidences and deaths of African American and Latino communities; utilizing its network in the United States, Japan and Germany to work with organizations providing direct assistance in Africa to provide comprehensive services that prevent the spread of HIV on the continent while treating persons already infected with the virus and caring for their children; the use of needle exchange programs when they are a part of a comprehensive effort to prevent and/or treat drug abuse.

African Americans do bear the burden of the virus in America. However, HIV/AIDS is indeed a human rights issue and must be addressed in that way. The virus is concentrated in the community for various reasons including factors associated with a lower socio-economic status, fear of stigma, denial and obtaining appropriate quality of care and/or equal access to health resources and services pertinent to survival.

Founded in 1909, the NAACP is the nation's oldest and largest civil rights organization. Its members throughout the United States and the world are the premier advocates for civil rights in their communities, conducting voter mobilization and monitoring equal opportunity in the public and private sectors.

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