

## **Men's Health Must Become a Priority for the Nation**

**By Dr. Henrie M. Treadwell and Dr. Clare Xanthos**

**ATLANTA-** Women's health advocacy is making tremendous strides, with government, foundations, non-profits and private industry leading the charge for greater awareness and treatment of health conditions impacting women. But unfortunately the same intensity has not been unleashed to adequately address health problems for men.

While outreach efforts have raised the awareness of breast cancer, urged women to seek proper prenatal care and lead to critical research into the major health problems of women, there seems overall to be far less advocacy for men. As a result, there has been far slower progress at addressing the chronic illnesses disproportionately striking men.

In fact, the health conditions of African American men exemplify the disparity, with black men experiencing some of the poorest health outcomes of any demographic in American society. The National Center for Health Statistics says life expectancy for a black male child born in 2004 is 69.5 years, compared with 75.7 years for white males born the same year.

To be sure, the statistics tell a bleak story about the health outcomes of African American men. Black men have higher death rates than women for all the leading causes of death. Moreover, black men suffer from higher rates of prostate cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension, stroke and other chronic illnesses.

The reasons for these disparities range from the impact of racial discrimination to poor access to healthcare services to the barriers caused by poverty to a lack of information about preventive care and many other factors.

What's clear, however, is that if research, preventive awareness and unhealthy behavior for men are ever going to change, it will take an advocacy effort similar to what feminists did for the women's health movement. Clearly, it was the campaign by women's activists that changed the nation's attitude towards women's health. Now, the same is needed to help change health outcomes for men.

In parts of the country, there are advocacy programs that are making a difference. In 2008, the Lorain (Ohio) County Branch of National Urban League in partnership with Community Voices: Healthcare for the Underserved at Morehouse School of Medicine and Pfizer launched a Save Ours Sons program for 42 African American males.

The program's objective was to develop a national, replicable health education model to reduce diabetes and obesity in African-American men, as well as connect program participants with comprehensive primary healthcare providers. The six-week program had a tremendous impact. At the start of the program only eight participants had a regular physician. After the intervention, 29 had a primary care physician. In addition, there were other healthy results. For instance, the participants:

- Increased exercise levels (98% exceeded goal of 150 min/week)
- Decreased obesity and overweight status by 7%
- Decreased hypertension by 23%
- Increased health insurance enrollment by more than 58%
- Increased local media attention about African-American men's health by 400%.

Meanwhile, in Detroit the 100 Black Men of Greater Detroit, Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan and the American Cancer Society joined together to sponsor an awareness campaign aimed at reducing deaths from prostate cancer. Members of 100 Black Men are visiting locations in the community, such as churches, barbershops and community centers to distribute information about prostate cancer, while giving advice on how to improve their overall health.

Programs, such as these, are helping in local communities. But advocacy for improving the health of men also must become a national cause.

It's time for men's health to become a top priority for the nation.

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