



National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC)
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Dear Editor:

Today, the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) begins a month of activities honoring [National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day](#). Held annually on February 7th during Black History Month, National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day seeks to "mobilize communities and address specific issues in regard to local epidemics and best practices that are science-based and will influence the course of HIV in Black communities across our country."

The importance of this year's National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day - and its theme: *Black Life Is Worth Saving* - cannot be overstated. The Inauguration of President Barack Obama on January 20, the day after Martin Luther King Jr. Day, was not only a time of celebration, but also a call to action. HIV/AIDS has been pushed to the background for too long in this country, and those with limited access to the necessities of life, such as education, health care and housing, have been left at risk.

African Americans have been disproportionately impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic since it began. Though they represent only 13% of the U.S. population, blacks bear 70% of the country's HIV/AIDS burden and represent nearly half of all new HIV cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) each year. This is particularly alarming in light of the CDC's announcement in August 2008 that HIV incidence in the U.S. is 40% higher than previously thought, with over 55,000 new HIV infections occurring from 2003-2006, and 56,300 cases in 2006 alone.

Stigma plays a huge role in fueling the epidemic in African American communities. It keeps people silent, even though the very future of black America is at risk. Over 200,000 African Americans have died of AIDS in the past twenty five years. AIDS is the leading cause of death among African-American women aged 25-34, and the third leading cause of death among African-American men in the same age group. Black gay/men who have sex with men also are testing positive for HIV in high numbers.

NMAC is helping to raise awareness about the impact of HIV/AIDS in black communities. The agency has set the application deadline for the Equal Access Initiative Computer Program, which provides minority faith- and community-based organizations (MF/CBOs) computers and training to facilitate client internet access, for February 7th, and will participate in the National American Bar Association on Minority Women and HIV/AIDS meeting, on February 14th. As a National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, HIV Vaccine Research and Education Initiative grantee, NMAC provides educational tools on its website about HIV vaccines, and encourages African Americans to participate in HIV vaccines trials.

Our website - <http://www.nmac.org/> - will feature several interviews about National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day with Hayes-Cozier, as well as "Leader of the Month" profiles of young African Americans heading the fight against HIV/AIDS on college campuses and in their communities. The agency's first public service announcement in over ten years, "African American Women GET REAL about AIDS," which features NMAC Board Member and singing legend, Nancy Wilson; CEO and Founder of Aspirations Wholistic Tutorial Services, Archbishop

Joyce Turner-Keller; and HIV/AIDS Activist, Ebony Gilreath speaking directly to African American women about the importance of knowing their HIV status, also will be available.

NMAC intends to continue being a powerful voice for MF/CBOs addressing HIV/AIDS in African American communities, working with the Congressional Black Caucus and encouraging people to contact their representatives on the Hill to support comprehensive, science-based and culturally-competent HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment and care programs.

To learn more about National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, as well as NMAC programs and services, please visit us online at www.nmac.org, or contact us directly at (202) 483-6622 or communications@nmac.org. We also may be found on Facebook.com, Wikipedia.com, YouTube.com and MyPhotoAlbum.com.

Sincerely,

Paul A. Kawata,
Executive Director
National Minority AIDS Council