

# HIV Vaccine Research Newsletter

A Publication of the National Minority AIDS Council

Issue 1 • Volume 1

## The Value of Health Communication Campaigns for Increasing Citizen Participation in HIV Vaccine Research



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There are significant challenges to motivating participation in HIV vaccine clinical research, particularly among groups who have been most negatively affected by HIV, such as African-Americans and Latino-Americans. Strategic communication efforts must be developed specifically for members of these at-risk groups.

These communication campaigns should help:

- Increase understanding about the need for effective vaccines
- Expand knowledge about the clinical research process
- Promote support for conducting clinical trials
- Motivate participation in important HIV vaccine research efforts

Effective campaigns must be designed and implemented to reflect cultural values and communication orientations of key audiences. Unique communication messages and delivery strategies should be used with different groups. One size will not fit all when it comes to effective communication efforts. We need to learn specific concerns that members of at-risk populations have about HIV vaccine research to provide information that addresses these concerns. We must use messages that resonate with different groups and are presented by credible, believable, and influential sources.

Communication campaigns are most effective when they use several different communication channels that provide reinforcing messages over time. Besides using print media (such as posters and newspaper articles), it is effective to also use more interactive communication channels. Some of these channels are face-to-face interpersonal communication, telephone hotlines, or even email and text messaging. Campaigns need to be long-lasting to influence attitudes and behaviors over time. By developing comprehensive and strategic communication campaigns we can increase community participation in HIV vaccine research!

## The Important Role of Clinicians in Helping to Build Community Awareness and Support for HIV Vaccine Research

*d*ata from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicates that in the United States approximately 1.2 million persons are currently living with HIV/AIDS.



**By Luther A. Virgil, M.D.**  
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Although minorities made up approximately 30% of the U.S. population in 2006, they significantly represented nearly seven out of 10 of the new HIV infections reported to the CDC.

For those who are infected, there have been positive gains. Advances in the treatment of HIV infection have been dramatic and unprecedented with marked improvements in survival and quality of life for those taking therapy. The new antiretroviral regimens, however, are not successful for all patients. Many patients find themselves facing a death from AIDS at the same time that many others are having favorable responses to antiretroviral therapy. This is one of the reasons why researchers are working so hard to develop an HIV vaccine, to prevent infection and possibly provide a cure.

The availability of a safe, highly effective, and accessible HIV vaccine would be of great value in contributing to the interruption of HIV transmission. Many of those infected, those in the community, and even medical providers caring for HIV infected patients, are unaware of the current status of vaccine research or even of the potential benefit of an effective vaccine. Communities of color are not only disproportionately infected with HIV, they also face significant barriers which make their populations less informed about vaccine research, less likely to participate in vaccine research, and less likely to gain any benefit. The barriers encoun-

tered by people of color underscore several needs. Communities of color need accurate, understandable, and culturally appropriate information about current efforts to develop HIV prevention and HIV therapeutic vaccines. They also need guidance and assistance with the formation of a coalition of groups, individuals and organizations focused on effective advocacy, actions, and the development of useful policy.

When considering the needs of communities of color as it relates to the awareness, assistance, and support necessary for them to benefit from HIV vaccine research, it becomes obvious that HIV clinicians are in a unique position to help fulfill many of those needs. Due to their daily experience in the treatment of HIV and their required continuing education, they can serve as important providers of accurate information to patients, advocates, community members, and even national political figures. Most minority medical providers and those educated about minority communities are able to communicate that education in a culturally appropriate and understandable fashion. Finally, as active and respected members of the community, clinicians can provide guidance to coalitions dedicated to the ultimate goal of the development of a successful preventive and therapeutic HIV vaccine.

Our best hope for ending the HIV epidemic in the United States and around the world may be a successful preventive vaccine. Clinicians who care for those infected with HIV have an important obligation to accept their role of imparting knowledge, guidance, and leadership in their communities, so that the goal of obtaining a vaccine can be reached.

## It Takes a Village to Develop a Vaccine for HIV



**Brenda Williams**  
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I've been providing HIV/AIDS prevention education in my community for quite a while now. It began when I was a Nursing Instructor and Director of Student Health Services at Albany State University. I was quite concerned about the high numbers of African Americans becoming infected in my area and also about the unsafe sexual behaviors of college students that increase their risk of becoming infected with the virus. The number of cases of HIV/AIDS reported for Southwest Georgia reflects the national numbers in terms of African Americans being infected at disproportionate rates.

In addition to engaging in HIV/AIDS prevention education at Albany State University, I've also been involved in similar efforts with various community health programs in the city and at my church. The African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church has taken a proactive role in HIV/AIDS awareness. The training and experiences that I have been able to receive over the years has allowed me to become very active in the church's response to HIV/AIDS.

Up until recently, my educational activities focused primarily on issues related to the transmission of HIV and safe sex practices. I believe those issues are extremely important and should be included in any discussion about preventing HIV/AIDS. My presentations have stimulated lively conversations and led many people to make significant lifestyle adjustments. Yet, we continue to see an increase in the number of infections among African Americans. Obviously, the need for a vaccine that will prevent HIV infection is critical.

I was delighted to learn about NMAC's NHVREI Community Liaison Training Program, and I didn't hesitate to sign up to participate. This program will allow me to play a leading role in helping to build support for HIV vaccine research among members of the AME Church in South Georgia. I will integrate accurate information about HIV vaccine research into the HIV/AIDS workshops I conduct locally and throughout the region. It is my belief that we must all be committed to educating and saving the lives of African Americans. This includes advocating and educating the community about the benefits of HIV vaccine research.

## The Need for Community Involvement in HIV Vaccine Research

**Albert Hannans**

Program Manager • NIAID HIV Vaccine Research Education Initiative • National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC)

HIV/AIDS is one of the most serious health threats of our time, and while existing HIV prevention interventions have proven to be quite effective, they have not been able to halt the spread of the disease. Finding a safe and effective vaccine is our best hope for stopping the AIDS pandemic.

The development of a vaccine for AIDS is impossible, however, without sufficient community involvement. Community members should play an active role in the entire process. In addition to volunteering for clinical trials, citizen participation is needed to help design trials that are acceptable to their communities, build public and government support for vaccine research, and ultimately, to ensure that the public accepts a safe and effective vaccine when it becomes available.

Therefore, it is crucial that the communities most affected by HIV/AIDS - especially African Americans and Latinos - are fully aware of vaccine research efforts and the potential public health benefits that vaccines might one day offer. Informed and involved communities are essential for the successful development of effective HIV vaccines.

But there is a great deal of public misunderstanding about HIV vaccine research. The lack of accurate knowledge is having an extremely

negative impact on African American and Latino support for the research being done. That is what compelled NMAC to become a national partner of NIAID's (National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases) HIV Vaccine Research Education Initiative (NHVREI). NMAC has spearheaded a broad spectrum of social marketing and outreach activities to help increase public awareness, knowledge, and support for HIV vaccine research. The activities include recruiting and training a small group of volunteer community liaisons to plan and implement health communication programs designed to foster greater participation of community members in HIV vaccine research education activities.

The volunteers (representing community- and faith-based organizations, clinics, AIDS service organizations, and colleges/universities) in NMAC's NHVREI Community Liaison Program have developed practical strategies for integrating HIV vaccine research education into their existing activities. They will conduct focus groups to pre-test the message concepts used to educate their community members. After implementing their programs, they will conduct follow-up evaluations to assess the impact of their community education activities.

The NHVREI Community Liaison Program will utilize a technique known as 'each-one-teach-one'. Each individual that receives the HIV vaccine research message created for the program will be encouraged to pass the information on to others in their families and communities. Similar public health campaigns to educate people about HIV and AIDS have proven to be quite effective in helping to dispel myths and misconceptions, and change behavior. Hopefully this program will lead to a significant increase in awareness, knowledge, and support for HIV vaccine research among African Americans and Latinos in the targeted areas.

## What Is Your HIV Vaccine IQ?

What do you know about HIV vaccines? Perhaps you've heard that there already is a vaccine — or that a vaccine would work in the same way as highly active antiretroviral therapy. These assertions are not true — but do you know why?

NMAC's HIV Vaccine Tutorial at <https://www.nmac.org/forms/HIVTutorial/quizlogin.php> is an excellent place to start your HIV vaccine education. This online tool tests your current knowledge base, takes you through intensive web training and re-tests your skill level when you are done. The tool is free-to-use over and over again. Here are some of the questions you'll be able to answer when you are done:

- Is AIDS really a problem in the U.S.?
- What HIV prevention tools are currently available and/or being developed?
- Why do HIV vaccine researchers need volunteers from different communities during clinical trials?
- Will participating in an HIV vaccine trial make me HIV positive?



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