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NMAC Commemorates National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

February 7, 2008 ~ Washington, DC ~ Today, the National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) honors the eighth annual National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NBHAAD). Held each year on February 7, NBHAAD seeks to increase awareness, participation and support for HIV prevention, care and treatment among African Americans.

“This year, National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day is taking place just two weeks after we honored the memory of Martin Luther King, Jr. In his honor, this day should serve as a clarion call to those in power that the continued disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS in Black communities is unacceptable,” says Paul A. Kawata, Executive Director of NMAC. “Each year, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that over half of all new HIV infections are occurring among African Americans. If left unchecked, this epidemic threatens the very future of Black communities nationwide. This is an unconscionable state of affairs in the United States.”

The statistics further support these fears. African Americans are infected with, and die from, HIV/AIDS more than any other racial or ethnic group, though they represent only 13% of the U.S. population. African American adults and adolescents are diagnosed with AIDS at 10 times the rate of whites, and nearly 3 times the rate of Latinos. Black men who have sex with men (MSM) and African American women have been particularly hard hit by HIV/AIDS. A CDC study of MSM found that 46% of the black MSM tested for HIV were positive, compared to 21% of the white MSM and 17% of the Hispanic MSM. Among African American women, AIDS has become one of the leading causes of death, leaving behind daughters, mothers, and generations that will never see a future.

Over 200,000 African Americans have died of AIDS in the past twenty five years.

These staggering statistics of course beg the question: Why are African Americans so disproportionately impacted by HIV/AIDS? Ethnicity, of course, is not a risk factor for HIV/AIDS; however, the social, economic, educational and political disenfranchisement experienced by many African Americans nationwide fuel HIV infections in black communities.

The 2007 United States Conference on AIDS held in Palm Springs, California paralleled the agency’s dedication to focusing on communities in the United States heavily impacted by, and at high risk for, HIV/AIDS. One plenary session addressed the “HIV/AIDS Crisis in the African American Community” and featured a panel of

accomplished speakers that included: Cornelius Baker of the National Black Gay Men's Advocacy Coalition and Senior Communications Advisor of COACH, AED; Dr. Kevin Fenton, Director of the National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; The Honorable Johnny Ford, Mayor of Tuskegee, Alabama; Debra Fraser-Howze, President/CEO of the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS (NBLCA); Ravinia Hayes-Cozier, Director of Government Relations and Public Policy, National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC); Dr. Beny Primm, Founder and Executive Director of Addiction Research and Treatment Corporation; Sheryl Lee Ralph, NMAC Celebrity Spokesperson; Valerie Spencer, Founder of Transcend Empowerment Institute; and Nancy Wilson, Board Member of NMAC.

“The session exemplified the need to make the meeting's theme – One Family, One Voice, One Spirit – a reality in our approach to HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment in African-American communities,” says Ravinia Hayes-Cozier, Director of NMAC's Government Relations and Public Policy Division, who served as the session's moderator. “We speak with many voices and many faces. But, whether we are focused on the unique needs of black gay men or the issues facing heterosexual African-American women, we speak and work with the same goal mind: reducing and eliminating HIV/AIDS from our communities.”

Also at the 2007 USCA, NMAC, in partnership with the National Library of Medicine (NLM), expanded the scope of its Equal Access Initiative (EAI) Computer Grants Program, with a series of trainings called the Equal Access Initiative: HIV/AIDS Information Resources from the National Library of Medicine Training. Through the EAI, funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Office of AIDS Research (OAR), NMAC distributes one hundred state-of-the art computer systems to faith- and community-based organizations (F/CBOs) delivering HIV/AIDS services in communities of color nationwide. With the computer, grantees are empowered to provide clients access to online HIV/AIDS-related information clearing houses; news sites; and trainings, enabling them to make informed choices related to prevention, treatment and care.

This year, grantees will once again receive a scholarship package that will include registration for the United States conference on AIDS, a travel credit and, most importantly, an invitation to a three hour comprehensive training course from the NLM to familiarize them with reliable online health information from government and other reputable resources that address HIV/AIDS and related medical conditions.

“We are so excited to provide participants with the tools to better serve their clients, colleagues and communities by arming them with the skills to effectively access treatment and prevention information,” raves Kawata. “And we hope having the applications due on National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day will translate into a huge opportunity to folks out there who are working hard to raise awareness and amplify the voice of communities of color in the national debate about, and response to, HIV/AIDS.”

NMAC also is proud to support the efforts of the G10, which includes Blacks in Government, Congressional Black Caucus, The Joint Center for Political and Economics Studies, National Association of Black County Officials, National Black Bar Association, National Black Caucus of Local Elected Officials, National Black Caucus of School Board Members, National Black Caucus of State Legislators, National Conference of Black Mayors, National Council of Black Judges, and the World Conference of Mayors. This group is working with NMAC to make HIV/AIDS policy a priority on the national and local levels, for themselves and the thousands of African-American elected officials they represent.

Fighting HIV/AIDS means ending stigma; ensuring everyone has access to quality health care; educating our young people about sexual responsibility; etc. With your help, NMAC, along with other organizations, can stop the AIDS crisis among African Americans, once and for all. NMAC cannot do this work alone. We need you.

Hayes-Cozier explains: “All of us working to address HIV/AIDS in black communities come from a place of compassion for those living with and impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic. We’re looking forward to doing more activities and forming new relations and collaborations FUBU style – that is, for us, by us.”

About the National Minority AIDS Council

The National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC) will honor its twentieth year as the premier national organizational dedicated to developing leadership within communities of color to address challenges of HIV/AIDS, in 2007. NMAC has responded to the needs of communities of color by developing programs aimed at enhancing the skills necessary to confront this health crisis, including a public policy education program, national and regional training conferences, a treatment and research program and numerous publications. Today, NMAC is an association of AIDS service organizations providing valuable information to community-based organizations, hospitals, clinics and other groups assisting individuals and families affected by the AIDS epidemic. NMAC's advocacy efforts are funded through private funders and donors only. For more information, call: (202) 234-5120; e-mail: communications@nmac.org; or visit: www.nmac.org.

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