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NATIONAL ALLIANCE OF STATE
& TERRITORIAL AIDS DIRECTORS

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United in Battling HIV/AIDS: A Guide to Understanding How Faith Communities Can Make a Difference

Churches and faith communities are well-positioned to impact and promote healthy behaviors and prevent the further spread of HIV/AIDS. This is in part due to a long tradition of service, compassion and support provided by churches to underserved communities and the indigent, including those that may be at increased risk for acquiring HIV/AIDS. Barriers that sometime prohibit faith communities from addressing HIV/AIDS include issues related to stigma, sexuality and/or condom use.

Yet, the faith community remains a practical setting for health promotion interventions. Research has shown that minorities tend to access care late in the illness process and are more likely to become connected to care in familiar locations like the Church rather than traditional medical settings. The role of the Church as a trusted safe haven, resource and caregiver has long been documented. This fact sheet attempts to provide necessary information, guidance and resources for faith communities to initiate, or enhance existing, health and HIV/AIDS activities or programs.

THE HIV/AIDS EPIDEMIC IN THE UNITED STATES: QUICK FACTS

HIV/AIDS is a crisis in the United States (U.S.) that has been reported in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and U.S. territories¹. Legislative representatives, state/local/federal agencies and the larger community, including the faith community, are critical partners in ending this epidemic and assuring the health and well-being of all citizens.

- **Over one million people** are currently living with HIV/AIDS in the U.S.;
- **Approximately 56,300 new infections** occurring each year;
- It is estimated that every **9 ½ minutes** someone in the U.S is infected with HIV/AIDS;
- Of those infected, approximately **21 percent** (one in five) are unaware of their infection¹;
- Heterosexual men and women **living below the poverty line** were twice as likely to be HIV-positive compared to those above the poverty line²;
- **Racial and ethnic minorities represent the majority of new infections**, of people living with HIV/AIDS and AIDS deaths;
- Approximately **one in 16 Black men** will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetime;
- **One in 30 Black women** will be diagnosed with HIV in their lifetime;
- **Hispanic/Latino men are twice as likely** to receive an HIV diagnosis as compared to white men;
- **Hispanic/Latino women are almost four times** more likely to be diagnosed HIV-positive than white women²;
- **African American youth**, ages 13-19, account for 68 percent of new AIDS cases among teens in the U.S.

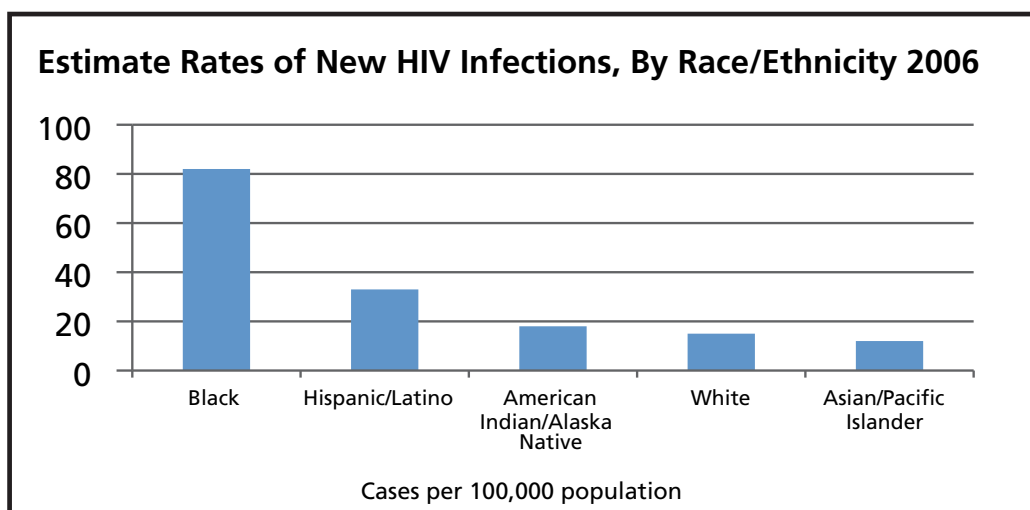
NATIONAL RESPONSE

In July 2010 the White House, Office of HIV/AIDS Policy released the first ever *National HIV/AIDS Strategy* (NHAS)³ with three primary goals:

1. Reduce the number of people who become infected with HIV;
2. Increase access to care and optimize health outcomes for people living with HIV; and
3. Reduce HIV-related health disparities.

The NHAS emphasizes the need for engagement and involvement at all levels, including federal, state, local, faith and community partners to educate and provide accurate information about the behaviors that place individuals at risk for HIV/AIDS, provide tools to prevent further infections, and encourage early diagnosis and entry into care for those persons who are already infected.

As part of the NHAS implementation, faith leaders, with other community leaders, are being called upon to identify the best ways to disseminate accurate health information to the community, provide referrals to care and address the stigma, fear, apathy and other factors that prevent individuals from making healthy life choices including getting tested for HIV.



Hall, H.I., Song, R., Rhodes P., et al. Estimations of HIV Incidence in the US, JAMA 2008; 300: 520-529.

The Florida Department of Health, Bureau of HIV/AIDS partnered with the General Baptist State Convention to establish an HIV outreach system with faith-based organizations affiliated with the Convention; approximately 100 churches statewide. During 2009, the General Baptist State Convention held twelve HIV education and testing events throughout the state. During the National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS, the General Baptist State Convention encouraged their entire membership of churches to conduct HIV activities in recognition of the observance.

OPTIMAL HEALTH IS THE GOAL⁵

The CDC has identified three important steps to protect individual health:

1. Get regular checkups;
2. Get tested to make sure you have no undiagnosed diseases, including HIV; and
3. Follow your doctor's advice.

HIV testing is a key component in our overall national strategy to addressing HIV/AIDS.

KNOWING YOUR STATUS IS KEY

- Individuals unaware of their HIV-positive status are not able to make fully-informed decisions regarding their own health or to make informed decisions about protecting the health of their sex or drug-use partners.
- People receiving an HIV positive test result have the opportunity to take advantage of treatment that can help sustain a longer, healthier life—and take steps to protect their partners.
- A negative HIV test result provides an opportunity for individuals to receive valuable HIV prevention information that can prevent them from becoming infected in the future.

Getting involved, taking action and providing information and education to communities about better health practices and HIV/AIDS: A Checklist

- Participate in the [National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS](#), March 2011
- Invite persons affected by HIV/AIDS to speak before the congregation
- Light a candle and have a moment of silence and meditation for the healing of AIDS and other chronic disease
- Host health fair and include HIV/AIDS information and testing
- Host commemoration events in remembrance of those infected and affected by HIV/AIDS
- Hand out educational/informational packets or resources, such as [We Are Greater Than](#) and [30 Years Strong! Together We Will Win](#) campaigns
- Plan activities in observance of HIV/AIDS Awareness Days; including [World AIDS Day](#), [National HIV Testing Day](#), [National Latino HIV/AIDS Awareness Day](#), [National Women and Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day](#) and/or [National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day](#)
- Host a music/gospel concert in recognition of the impact of HIV/AIDS in the community
- Host a community service of remembrance and hope
- Host a pray vigil for those impacted by HIV/AIDS
- Sponsor a HIV testing event and invite the health department or community agency to provide HIV testing (see below)
- Host a poetry slam for youth and invite local artist to perform HIV/AIDS inspired poetry
- Host a legislative briefing by faith leaders
- Establish health ministries within the church and other faith-based institutions

State and local health departments are ideal partners for faith communities to engage for support and resources (i.e., collaborating on an HIV testing events). Click here to access [NASTAD's State Health Department HIV/AIDS Program Directory](#).

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO PLAN HIV/AIDS ACTIVITIES/ PROGRAMS:

- [HHS Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [National Alliance of State and Territorial AIDS Directors](#) (NASTAD), for a list of State/local health department
- [National Minority AIDS Council](#), for a list of local AIDS service organizations
- [The Balm in Gilead, Inc.](#), sponsor of the National Week of Prayer for the Healing of AIDS
- [National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS](#), the oldest and largest nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating the AIDS epidemic in our nation's African-American communities
- [Latino Commission on AIDS](#), a nonprofit membership organization dedicated to fighting the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Latino community
- [AIDS.gov](#), for more basic information about HIV/AIDS and federal resources
- Locate additional HIV prevention and care providers in your area by visiting, <http://locator.aids.gov/>

1 The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation. *HIV/AIDS Policy Fact Sheet*; November 2010.

2 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *HIV in the United States*, <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/prints/us.htm>; July 2010.

3 National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. White Paper on Social Determinants of Health, *Establishing a Holistic Framework to Reduce Inequities in HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STDs and Tuberculosis in the United States*; 2010.

4 The White House. *National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States*; July 2010.

5 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. *Resources for HIV Screening: Revised CDC Recommendations*; November 2010

6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Revised Recommendations for HIV Testing of Adults, Adolescents, and Pregnant Women in Health-Care Settings. *MMWR*, 55 (RR14), 1-17; September 2006.



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