



## Positive Voice Alert

### National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day 2008: A Demand for Change

“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy” - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Deeply entrenched in this country's history is a legacy of unfavorable race relations that began with slavery, were enforced by segregation laws after slaves were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation, and continue to show residual effects today. A recent report released by Kaiser illuminates the disproportionate devastation HIV and AIDS has had on the African American community – 2% of non-Hispanic blacks were HIV-positive, compared with 0.23% of whites and 0.3% of Mexican-Americans – with a less than adequate response from our country's government. If there was ever a time for a comprehensive and aggressive response to HIV/AIDS in Black America, the time is now.

The Black community has a history of supporting those in need, and has an opportunity during AIDSWatch April 28 - 30, 2008 to continue this legacy by embracing everyone regardless of sexual orientation, serostatus, or affliction. HIV has been shown to merely be a symptom of the realities of the un- or underinsured, those coping with mental health and substance use challenges, and economic uncertainty. This population also suffers from higher rates of numerous health challenges (diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, etc.). However the government has demonstrated its compassion and concern by continued flat funding and/or decreased allocation of resources for comprehensive sex education, HIV research, the Ryan White Care Act, and many other mechanisms that help to respond to the domestic AIDS epidemic.

Scientists and community activists will continue to publish research and make repeated visits to Capitol Hill to

demand access to LIFE, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness through investment in science-based HIV prevention and comprehensive access to care, treatment, and supportive services. Stigma remains a unique barrier to bringing people forward to learn their HIV status, have much needed open and honest dialogue with loved ones, and remain consistent and adherent to healthcare and treatment. As we commemorate National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day this Black History month, in the same manner that it was made clear that separate is not equal, we cannot allow our diagnosis to deny our humanity. NAPWA would like to acknowledge our progress and invite all persons to reinvigorate themselves for the road ahead. Even today, we must *by any means necessary* demand that our country protect and respect the lives of persons living with HIV and commit our resources to finding a vaccine and/or a cure.

Community advocates are making plans as we speak to converge on Washington D.C. at this year's AIDSWatch to demand change in the fight against the domestic HIV/AIDS epidemic. Those of us living with HIV are sharing our stories to inform strategies to prevent future infections and secure services for those in need. Service providers are demanding implementation of better structures that increase their ability to respond to the HIV epidemic in their regions. Individuals affected by HIV are moving beyond symbolic gestures to tangible expressions of compassion. Faith based institutions are learning that their beliefs should not impede their efforts to respond to those in need. **February 7, 2008 is a day that calls for retiring our judgment and focusing our energies toward preserving the lives of those we love in our families, communities, and our country.**

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NAPWA is the trusted voice of the greater than one million people living with HIV/AIDS in the United States.

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