Rev. Jesse Jackson Joins American Cancer Society at a Conference to Address Cancer Disparities in Minorities

American Cancer Society Hosts Second Cancer Disparities Research Conference in New Orleans, April 19-20

Despite a reported decline in cancer deaths earlier this year, minorities still experience disproportionately higher incidences of cancer as well as other diseases. Today, the American Cancer Society hosts its second cancer disparities research conference -- 'Bridging the Health Care Divide' -- in New Orleans to strategically address disparities in cancer and access to care. This conference brings together researchers and experts in the area of cancer disparities -- including the Society's key leadership -- to discuss best practices that will improve access to health care for minorities and the medically underserved. For more information on the conference, visit http://www.cancer.org/cancerdisparities.

"The disparities gap is growing wider, and sometimes it seems like the bridge may be impossible to build," said Rev. Jesse Jackson, president and founder, RainbowPUSH Coalition, and keynote speaker at the conference. "But this is a problem that can be solved, and we cannot be daunted by the challenges."

Mounting evidence shows that access to quality health care is a major issue in this country. Members of racial and ethnic minority groups often have less access to cancer prevention information, early detection and high quality treatment, which denies them the advantage of existing cancer advances. One important factor contributing to this limited access is the lack of health insurance; according to the Society's Cancer Facts & Figures for 2007, 18 percent of African Americans and 35 percent of Hispanics are uninsured.

"Unfortunately, the groups of people who need health insurance and access to quality cancer care the most are the ones who bear the disproportionate burden of many diseases, " said Durado Brooks, M.D., MPH, director of prostate and colorectal cancer at the American Cancer Society and chair of the conference planning committee. "Now is a good time to address the issue of lack of care and prevent unnecessary deaths from cancer and other preventable and curable diseases."

Studies to be shared at the conference will emphasize the lack of utilization of screening and early detection among minorities as well as the implications on these communities. These studies will also address cancer disparities through community involvement and identification of opportunities to eliminate cancer disparities in minorities.

Eliminating disparities in the cancer burden is one of the American Cancer Society's 2015 Challenge Goals to the nation. The Society aims to reduce cancer incidence and mortality among minority groups and socioeconomically-disadvantaged people to levels comparable to the general population.

In support of the Society's goal to help reduce disparities, the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network(SM) (ACS CAN), the Society's sister advocacy organization, is working with lawmakers to pass laws that can have a significant impact on reducing cancer disparities nationwide. Enacting federal legislation to increase funding for the CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program and establishing a colon cancer early detection and treatment program -- which would help reduce barriers to screening for low-income, uninsured and underinsured Americans -- are high priorities for ACS CAN.

The Society has awarded thirty-six million dollars since 1999 in research grants targeted to the poor and underserved to help reduce the cancer burden faced by these populations. At the federal level, the Society has lobbied for increased funding of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Center on Minority Health and Health Disparities. The Society supported the establishment of this center, which leads and coordinates efforts to improve the health of minority and medically underserved populations.

Many of the Society's programs and services have been developed with diverse populations and are available in other languages. Aconseje a su Amiga(R) is a program which encourages Latino women to get mammograms and Pap tests. Body & Soul: A Celebration of Healthy Living is a collaboration with the National Cancer Institute and promotes nutrition in African American churches to help reduce cancer risk.

The American Cancer Society makes reliable information regarding cancer prevention and early detection available any time, day or night. Trained cancer information specialists are available at its toll-free cancer information service at 1-800-ACS-2345 to answer calls 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Callers can be assisted in Spanish as well as other languages including Portuguese, Vietnamese and Mandarin. At the Society's website, http://www.cancer.org/, visitors can find the latest cancer news, links to community resources and events, informative books, Spanish and Asian-language materials. There is also an online community of fellow patients, survivors, and caregivers who understand and inspire through the Cancer Survivors Network(SM).

The American Cancer Society is dedicated to eliminating cancer as a major health problem by saving lives, diminishing suffering and preventing cancer through research, education, advocacy and service. Founded in 1913 and with national headquarters in Atlanta, the Society has 13 regional Divisions and local offices in 3,400 communities, involving millions of volunteers across the United States. For more information, call 1-800-ACS-2345 or visit http://www.cancer.org/

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