

CITY OF BALTIMORE

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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For Immediate Release

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Baltimore City and County Launch Initiative to Address Disparities in Cardiovascular Disease

BALTIMORE, MD - (April 12, 2007)-- Mayor Sheila Dixon, Congressman Elijah E. Cummings, and Delegate Shirley Nathan-Pulliam are announcing a regional initiative to reduce heart disease, strokes, diabetes, and other cardiovascular conditions that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minorities.

The initiative will pull together experts from throughout the region to identify 10 to 20 evidence-based programs that, if funded, will reduce the approximately 5-year gap in life expectancy between African-Americans and whites.

A March 2007 study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found cardiovascular disease to be the leading reason for earlier death among African-Americans, accounting for about two years of the longevity gap in both men and women. Numerous reports have documented major disparities in access to care, prevalence of such risk factors as hypertension and diabetes, and quality of care.

Yet research also has shown that certain efforts can reduce cardiovascular disease, and in the process reduce unjust health disparities. The goal of the Health Disparities Action Initiative is to identify and promote those approaches most likely to succeed in the Baltimore region. These approaches may range from public health interventions to expansions of access to community-based care to changes in medical practice. The Initiative will also establish clear guideposts to assess whether progress is being made.

“I am pleased to announce this important effort to reduce unnecessary suffering and death from cardiovascular disease in Baltimore,” said Mayor Sheila Dixon. “We’re taking aim at the leading killer in Baltimore City.”

“It’s time to move from research to action on health disparities,” said Congressman Elijah E. Cummings, honorary co-chair of the effort. “I look forward to seeing a clear agenda for progress and to implementing best practices that can save lives.”

“It’s important for communities to set their own priorities on how to end health disparities,” said Delegate Shirley Nathan-Pulliam, honorary co-chair. “This is an important step forward for the Baltimore region.”

“No jurisdiction is immune from the problems that result from failure to provide equitable access to healthcare and education about health from individuals of different races, ethnicities, social economic backgrounds and genders,” said Dr. Pierre Vigilance, Baltimore County Health Officer. “This initiative highlights the fact that finding solutions is a shared responsibility”

The Health Department is seeking public input on how to reduce disparities in cardiovascular disease. The comment period is open until May 12, 2007. See www.baltimorehealth.org for more information.

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