

FACT SHEET

March of Dimes Programs Working with African-American Communities to Reduce Disparities in Birth Outcomes

Partnerships

For nearly 30 years, the March of Dimes has partnered with Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity and Zeta Phi Beta sorority:

- ◆ About 31 percent of chapters have worked with Alpha Phi Alpha to implement Project Alpha® events. In 2006, the program provided information about teen pregnancy prevention to more than 4,500 young men.
- ◆ In 2003, Zeta Phi Beta and the March of Dimes began offering annual Prematurity Awareness Weekend to 100,000 people at more than 150 churches.
- ◆ In 2006, the sorority and the March of Dimes operated 390 Stork's Nests® programs reaching 20,500 underserved and predominantly African-American women. Launched in 1972, Stork's Nests provide expectant mothers with prenatal care education, maternity and infant clothes and furniture at low or no cost.

The March of Dimes National Prematurity Campaign Alliance expands the reach of this effort through organizations with a concern for health disparities. Members include the National Medical Association; the National Healthy Start Association; CityMatCH members, which represent urban health departments; the National Rural Health Association; the Association of State and Territorial Health Officers; and the National Association of County and City Health Officials.

Chapter Community-Based Programs

March of Dimes chapters work to reduce disparities in birth outcomes by funding community-based efforts to address these disparities; by working with organizations representing at-risk communities; and by initiating and supporting local legislative and regulatory initiatives to reduce disparities. Chapters recruit volunteers representing a range of racial and ethnic backgrounds so their committees represent the diversity of their community.

Some examples of chapter programs:

- ◆ The *Minnesota State Chapter* provided funding to Southside Community Health Services to work with 35 pregnant women – 57 percent of whom were African-American, 14 percent African, and 29 percent Hispanic. All 35 women had healthy, full-term infants.
- ◆ With funding from the *Wisconsin State Chapter*, the “Blanket of Love” program provides prenatal education and support to pregnant African-American women and their families. None of the 25 babies born to women participating in the program in 2006 had complications.

- ◆ The *North Carolina Chapter* provided funding to IMPRINTS, which served 253 pregnant women using the March of Dimes Pregnancy Workshop curriculum. The agency served 102 African-American women and 151 Hispanic women. Of the 96 babies born in this group in 2006, 5 percent were premature, half of the prematurity rate in a comparison group.
- ◆ The *New Jersey Chapter* provided 222 paraprofessionals who cared for pregnant and parenting women of color with information about the effect of stress on preterm labor and low birthweight. They also provided stress reduction education.
- ◆ Through a separate program, the *NJ* chapter worked with members of church congregations in African-American communities to train lay prenatal healthcare advocates. These advocates help women overcome barriers to prenatal care and increase awareness about maternal-child health services.
- ◆ The *South Carolina Chapter* implemented “Effectively Impacting Racial & Ethnic Disparities in South Carolina,” which strengthened existing partnerships and actively sought out new partnerships with African-American organizations. It also developed an African-American Steering Committee.
- ◆ The *Texas Chapter* has implemented “Honey Child,” in partnership with local churches in cities chosen because of their high numbers of premature and severely underweight African-American babies. The program trains women to help instruct pregnant women on the importance of doctor visits, nutrition, stress relief, self-esteem and other topics.

National Community-Based Programs

- ◆ In 2005, the March of Dimes received a multi-year grant titled “Reducing Disparities in Premature Birth” from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in maternal and infant health outcomes. The grant funds pilot programs in California, Florida, Illinois, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Texas. The sites will test a range of interventions in the areas of preconception health, enhancing service delivery and other community partnerships.
- ◆ In 2005, the March of Dimes National Office also received a two-year grant from the Office of Minority Health to provide education and services to pregnant women and families with infants in Louisiana affected by the 2005 gulf coast hurricanes.
- ◆ In 2007, through its Hurricane Assistance Fund efforts, the March of Dimes will deploy four mobile health vans that will expand maternal and child health services to local communities in Louisiana and Mississippi affected by the 2005 hurricanes.

Advocacy

The March of Dimes advocates for national legislation to increase access to coverage of uninsured women of childbearing age, particularly those who are pregnant, and for infants and children. Some examples:

- ◆ The federal *Prevent Prematurity and Improve Child Health Act*, introduced in March 2007 and supported by the March of Dimes, seeks to increase access to coverage for pregnant women, infants and children who meet the income eligibility guidelines for Medicaid and for the State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

- ◆ For 2008, the March of Dimes is seeking increased federal funding for research and activities authorized in 2006 by the Prematurity Research Expansion and Education for Mothers who deliver Infants Early Act (the PREEMIE Act). Funds would be used for studies on preterm birth, including the relationship between prematurity, birth defects and developmental disabilities and would also establish a system to track pregnancy outcomes and prevent preterm birth. The Act also calls for a Surgeon General's conference on preterm birth to establish a public-private agenda to speed the development of prevention strategies.
- ◆ The March of Dimes has asked Congress increase funding for the National Center on Minority Health and Disparities by \$13 million to conduct and support research, programs, disseminate information, and reach out to African-American and other minority communities.

Public Awareness and Education

- ◆ The March of Dimes is working with RCA recording artist and Tony Award-winner Heather Headley in the March of Dimes "I Want My Nine Months" campaign. The campaign seeks to educate women -- especially black women -- about what they can do to reduce their chance of having a premature baby.
- ◆ The March of Dimes works with media outlets aimed at African-American audiences to raise awareness of preterm birth. Radio partner American Urban Radio Network, the largest provider of radio programming to predominantly black radio stations in the U.S., donates millions of dollars in advertising each year with prematurity messaging.
- ◆ Through their annual Prematurity Summits and Prematurity Awareness Day activities, March of Dimes chapters have raised awareness of the epidemic of premature birth. Many have focused on reducing disparities in birth outcomes.

Medical Research

- ◆ The March of Dimes Perinatal Epidemiological Research Initiative (PERI), a multi-year program that began in 1998, funds grants to examine the interaction of medical, genetic, epidemiologic, and psychosocial factors that may contribute to preterm delivery. Some grants look for gene variations that may explain why some racial/ethnic groups are at increased risk; others examine social and behavioral factors that may affect pregnancy outcomes.

Professional Development

- ◆ The March of Dimes/Johnson & Johnson Pediatric Institute Grand Rounds program includes presentations for chapters on disparities in birth outcomes and how to address them.
- ◆ The Prematurity Compendium, a continuing education program for health care professionals, offers information on racial/ethnic disparities and cultural competence.
- ◆ A *Medical Perspective* summarizing data and medical news about disparities in preterm birth outcomes is posted on the March of Dimes prematurity Web site at: http://www.marchofdimes.com/prematurity/21326_19349.asp.

- ◆ March of Dimes Nursing Modules present information on racial/ethnic disparities and socioeconomic risks. Topics include culturally sensitive caregiving and the health needs of different ethnic groups.
- ◆ Since 2004, the March of Dimes has partnered with the National Medical Association to sponsor an annual professional education CME symposium on medical topics related to preterm birth.

Other National Programs

- ◆ The March of Dimes produces several versions of its health education materials, some target non-English speakers, others are aimed at different racial groups, including African-American women.
- ◆ An African American Outreach Community News page has been added to the March of Dimes intranet Web site, providing a centralized place to share information about programs to reduce disparities in birth outcomes.
- ◆ The Genetics Education Needs Evaluation (GENE) Project is a five-year cooperative agreement that began in 2000 between the March of Dimes and the Maternal and Child Health Bureau of the Health Resources & Services Administration (HRSA MCHB). This project is investigating the need for consumer genetics education to help underserved communities make informed health decisions. It develops community-based strategies to improve consumer access to genetics information, resources and services.
- ◆ The Consumer Genetics Education Network (CGEN) Project is a new five year cooperative agreement with HRSA MCHB that was initiated in 2005. The March of Dimes is collaborating with four ethnically diverse communities to develop and evaluate culturally sensitive genetic education materials that will be widely disseminated by our chapters and national partners to provide relevant genetic information to appropriate audiences.

August 9, 2007