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The Crises of HIV/AIDS in the African American Community

The National Medical Association (NMA) is the largest and oldest national organization representing 30,000 African American physicians and the patients they serve. With a national headquarters in Washington D.C., the organization is comprised of over 100 local, state, and regional NMA affiliates located in 46 states, and member physicians' practices in 24 specialty areas such as Internal Medicine, Emergency Medicine, Obstetrics and Gynecology, and Community Medicine and Public Health. For over 100 years, the NMA has remained committed to improving the health status and outcomes of minority and the disadvantaged through its membership, professional development, community health education, advocacy, and research efforts, especially as it relates to HIV/AIDS.

We all know the statistics. The *National Center for Health Statistics 2006 Report* indicates that HIV/AIDS is one of the top 10 leading causes of death for African Americans. African Americans also accounted for more than half (54 percent) of new HIV infections in the United States. So where do we go from here and why has HIV/AIDS remained so rampant despite our best efforts?

At no other time in history have I witnessed the vast political attention that is focused on the AIDS crisis in the developing world. However, challenges to adequate care and treatment for those living with HIV in resource limited settings remain daunting in the U.S. The urgent need remains for science to determine how best to provide and monitor antiretroviral treatment in resource poor populations and settings. Substantial investment is also needed in health care delivery systems to increase personnel, diagnostics, supplies, equipment, and facilities to sustain long-term care. But more importantly, it will take our *collective will* to continually reinforce key messages on HIV/AIDS prevention, testing and treatment, as well as the funding and resources to adequately put muscle behind the words. We can no longer simply attend HIV/AIDS meetings and develop papers on probable solutions—it is time for increased commitment and action.

It is clear that African Americans are being ravaged by this disease. Public outcry over alarming death rates from HIV/AIDS has not done enough to catalyze political action for our segment of the population. The formidable health care challenges and inconsistencies in HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment can no longer be used as an excuse to deny or delay increased access for our sick and dying community. We are past the critical stage. Our communities must have the equitable resources to develop our own long-term, sustainable solutions to this crisis. Our brothers, mothers, sisters, children—our families are dying. We can not and must not rest until we have the resources in hand and programs in place to stop this heinous disease. As long as HIV/AIDS remains unchecked it affects not only African Americans and other underserved minorities, it affects us all.

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