



News Release



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SURVEY SHOWS BLACK ELECTED OFFICIALS SEE HIV/AIDS AS A MORE URGENT PROBLEM IN THEIR COMMUNITIES THAN IN RECENT YEARS

BEOs Critical of All Levels of Government for Not Doing Enough to Address the Epidemic

(Washington, DC) According to a survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation and the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, black elected officials in the U.S. feel a strong sense of urgency about the spread of the AIDS epidemic in their communities. They believe that all levels of government need to do more, particularly the federal government, and that the African American community has benefited less from advances made in the fight against the epidemic than the nation as a whole.

The survey is the first to gauge the attitudes and opinions of a cross-section of national and local black elected officials (BEOs) about HIV/AIDS issues in the African American community. The survey included 550 black elected officials in 12 states and jurisdictions that have been hard hit by the HIV epidemic. Combined, these geographic areas account for 42% of BEOs, 61% of the black population, and 74% of blacks living with AIDS nationwide. The officials interviewed also mirror the distribution of black elected officials by state and by type of office, with municipal officials comprising the largest share (45%), followed by elected officials in education (27%). Others surveyed included officials from the judiciary, federal, state, or county government.

Perceptions of the Epidemic

BEOs overwhelmingly report a sense of urgency about the HIV/AIDS epidemic across the country and particularly in their own communities. Eighty-seven percent say that it is a serious national problem, and 82% believe it is an even more urgent problem locally than it was a few years ago. Further, more than half (56%) believe it is a bigger problem for African Americans than whites.

“Despite the progress so far, AIDS continues to have a deep and disproportionate impact on the African American community,” said Drew E. Altman, Ph.D., president and CEO of the Kaiser Family Foundation. “Black elected officials feel this impact and believe that the government at all levels needs to do more to address the urgent need,” he added.

A significant majority of BEOs have had personal contact with the epidemic—72% report knowing someone who now has AIDS, has died from it or has tested positive for HIV.

(more)

Call for Greater Commitment from All Levels of Government

While BEOs agree that the nation is making progress in fighting the epidemic, particularly in the area of drug therapies, the majority believes that more progress has been made in the larger society than in African American communities. BEOs are critical of their own involvement in combating HIV/AIDS—only one quarter believe that black leaders and professionals care a lot about HIV, and only one in five believe BEOs are doing much to address it—but they also say that the federal government needs to make a greater commitment. Fewer than one in five give federal, state and local government credit for doing “a lot” to address the epidemic.

- More than half (56%) of BEOs say the federal government is doing very little to address the epidemic in the African American community;
- Eighty percent say the federal government spends too little on HIV/AIDS;
- Nearly 3 in 4 (72%) say federal spending on AIDS is too low in comparison to spending on other health issues; and
- Nine out of 10 (88%) say the Federal government should be involved “a lot” in HIV/AIDS issues, 82% say the same of state government, and 73% believe that local government should be involved “a lot.”

“It is encouraging that black elected officials are using their public platform to advocate for more resources to stem the spread of HIV/AIDS in their communities,” said Eddie N. Williams, president of the Joint Center. “Their involvement is critical in ensuring that comprehensive treatment and prevention programs are adopted.”

Support for Array of Strategies to Address the Epidemic

BEOs are largely supportive of a number of strategies, some controversial, to address the epidemic. Sixty-two percent support needle-exchange programs and mandatory reporting of the names of HIV-positive people to health departments, and 88% support making it a crime for HIV-positive persons to knowingly have unsafe sex. Sixty-four percent would support AIDS education for youngsters under the age of 10, and 95% support legislation making HIV/AIDS treatment available to everyone.

Access to Health Care Services and Financing

Most BEOs surveyed do not believe that African Americans with AIDS have the same access to health care services and coverage as whites.

- Only about one-quarter (23%) think that African Americans with HIV/AIDS can afford medications, while 60% believe this is true of whites;
- One-third (33%) believe that very few African Americans with HIV/AIDS who want newer combination drugs have access to them;
- Few believe that African Americans with HIV/AIDS have the same access to the latest treatment (19%), to mental health care (31%), or to insurance coverage (18%) as do whites.

BEOs also believe that insurance coverage greatly influences the quality of HIV/AIDS care received: 40% of BEOs surveyed believe that those with public insurance do not receive the same quality of care as those with private insurance.

“Sadly, perceptions that African Americans with HIV/AIDS have less access to care and treatment are borne out in reality,” said Marsha Lillie-Blanton, Dr.PH., vice president of the Kaiser Family Foundation. “For example, research shows that African Americans and Latino Americans are less likely to receive combination therapy,” she continued. According to a 1996 national RAND study of people with HIV, 56% of African Americans compared to 32% of whites did not receive combination therapy.

Methodology

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies/Kaiser Family Foundation Survey of Black Elected Officials (BEOs) on HIV/AIDS is based on a sample of 550 black elected officials from 12 states and jurisdictions. The states were selected based on a number of factors including the impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on African Americans, the size of the African American population, and the number of black elected officials. A random sample of BEOs in these states, stratified by gender and type of office (e.g., federal, state, municipal, school board) was selected. The survey was conducted by Research America between the first week in November 1999 and January 2000. The margin of error is +/-4%. Note that in addition to sampling error there are other possible sources of measurement error.

The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, based in Menlo Park, California, is a non-profit independent national health care philanthropy dedicated to providing information and analysis on health issues to policymakers, the media and the general public. The Foundation is not associated with Kaiser Permanente.

The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, conducts research and analyses on public policy issues of concern to African Americans and other minorities, promotes their involvement in the governance process, and operates programs that create coalitions within minority, business, and other diverse communities. For more information, please visit www.jointcenter.org.

Findings from this survey were published in a supplement entitled “Mobilizing to Fight HIV/AIDS in the African American Community” that will be released in conjunction with a forthcoming issue of the journal *Minority Health Today*. Copies of the journal supplement (publication # 1632) and an accompanying chartpack (publication # 1620) of survey findings are available through the Foundation’s publications request line at (800) 656-4533. Copies of the chartpack can also be found online at: www.kff.org/minorityhealth