

national

The State of AIDS

Conference and report focus on African-American women

by Sarah Dougher

The first-ever national conference on HIV/AIDS to focus on African-American women is being held Dec. 1 to 4 at the Omni Hotel in Los Angeles.

The conference is titled "It's All About M.E.E.! Sistahs Getting Real About HIV: Mobilization, Education, Empowerment." In conjunction with the conference, a national report, *The State of AIDS Among Black Women in America*, was released during a press conference Dec. 1. The report provides data surrounding the scope of the disease among black women and information about why black women are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. The report also examines HIV/AIDS policy issues that affect black women and makes recommendations to end the epidemic.

"The conference is designed to give black women the information and resources they need to make a meaningful and valuable contribution to stopping the spread of HIV in black communities," says Vanessa Johnson, National Association of People with AIDS board chairwoman. "It will raise awareness about the magnitude of HIV/AIDS among black women and educate women on the ways in which HIV impacts their lives."

The conference itself will provide capacity-building tools and address prevention, testing and

treatment barriers by creating a national HIV/AIDS platform for black women.

"Ultimately, this conference will serve as an impetus to mobilize black women and girls to take on leadership roles in curbing the epidemic in their lives and communities," says Phill Wilson, Black AIDS Institute executive director. "Black women get infected with HIV every day. They are mothers, daughters, sisters and grandmothers. These numbers will only continue to grow unless something is done fast."

The conference will also include the launching of the "Sistahs Getting Real About HIV" billboard and public service announcements campaign. Through the support of Clear Channel Outdoor and the organization 100 Black Women, 15 billboards will be placed throughout the cities of Oakland, San Jose and Richmond, Calif.

Notable guests attending the conference include U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee, D-Calif., and actresses Sheryl Lee Ralph and Gloria Reuben. Ralph made her professional debut in *A Piece of the Action*. She has appeared in several other films including *Sister Act*, *The Flintstones* and *Sister Act 2*. In 1991 she won the Independent Spirit Award for Best Supporting Actress for *To Sleep with Anger*. Reuben plays a brainy HIV-positive physician's assistant who was infected by her husband on the NBC hit *ER*.

AIDS is the leading cause of death for black women between the ages of 24 and 34. Black women account for 69 percent of new HIV/AIDS cases among women and are 19 times as likely as white women to have HIV/AIDS.

This conference is a collaboration among the Black AIDS Institute, National Association of People with AIDS, National Coalition of 100 Black Women and Essence Communications.

The National Association of People with AIDS is the oldest national AIDS organization in the United States and the oldest national network of people living with HIV/AIDS in the world. Founded in 1983, the non-profit membership organization advocates on behalf of all people living with HIV/AIDS in order to end the pandemic and the human suffering it causes. More than 1 million U.S. citizens are living with HIV, and more than 40 million people around the world are infected.

Founded in 1999, the Black AIDS Institute is the only HIV/AIDS think tank in the United States focused



The National Coalition of 100 Black Women, Inc. Oakland Bay Area Chapter

SISTAHS GETTING REAL ABOUT HIV/AIDS

"African-American Women are the fastest growing population with AIDS in the U.S. as well as in CALIFORNIA"

Source: California Department of Health Services, Office of AIDS

1-800-342-2437 (24 hours a Day)

www.100blackwomen.net • www.ashaid.org
www.iwanttoknow.org (for text)

BusinessWoman

Billboards like this one focus attention on the disproportionate effect of HIV/AIDS on African-American women, who are 19 times as likely as white women to have the disease.

exclusively on black people. Its mission is to stop the AIDS pandemic in black communities by engaging and mobilizing black institutions and individuals in efforts to confront HIV. The institute conducts HIV policy research, interprets public and private sector policies, conducts trainings, builds capacity, disseminates information and provides advocacy from a uniquely and unapologetically black point of view.

Founded in 1981, the National Coalition of 100 Black Women mission is the development of socially conscious female leaders who are committed to furthering equity and empowerment for women of color in society at large, improving the environment of their neighborhoods, rebuilding their communities and enhancing the quality of public and private resources for the growth and development of disadvantaged youths. 10

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