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ReportersMonica J. Foster
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Photographer

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415 N. Killingsworth St.
P.O. Box 5455
Portland, OR 97228Telephone (503) 285-5555
Fax: (503) 285-2900

info@theskanner.com

www.TheSkanner.com

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Opinion

African Americans and the Affordable Care Act

The passage of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) promised to improve the delivery of healthcare services in America — especially for historically disadvantaged communities that suffer high rates of chronic illness.

The ACA has begun to deliver on that promise, but work still remains to ensure all who need healthcare in the most prosperous nation on earth can receive it.

Healthcare.gov is now available for the open enrollment period through Jan. 31, 2016. It's imperative that members of the African American community take advantage of this opportunity to access the coverage and care they need.

Some of the greatest gains in reducing the number of uninsured people in the U.S. have been realized in the African American community, which has seen a 30 percent increase in those with health insurance. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), nearly 8 million African Americans now have access to critical preventive services, including mammograms and flu shots.

The benefit is extended fur-

Patricia A. Maryland,
Dr.PHNNPA
Columnist

ther for adults whose children up to age 26 can remain on their parent's health insurance.

That includes some 500,000 African Americans.

Now, our focus turns to educating and mobilizing groups where more work needs to

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be done, in particular with African American males. Within this group, 43 percent suffer from high blood pressure, compared to nearly 34 percent of all white men. And black males are more than 30 percent more likely to contract lung cancer, even

though their overall exposure to cigarette smoke (the primary risk factor for the disease) is lower. These rates are primarily attributed to affordability and limited access to care. Thanks to the ACA those limitations to care have been lifted.

For those living in poor and minority communities, cost has always been a major barrier to care. However, access to care is now more broadly available, thanks to an expansion of Medicaid in many states, the Children's Health Insurance Program,

participate, so access to coverage is limited to some who need it most.

Another barrier to health insurance is lack of information. Therefore, our job — yours and mine — is to help spread the word about the ease of signing up for insurance using Healthcare.gov. For those who have used the program before, it is important that they review their policy to see if it still meets their needs and fits within their budget. For those would-be first-timers, take them by the hand and lead them through the site.

The Affordable Care Act has begun to meet its goal of revitalizing our healthcare system and making it more accessible and affordable to all Americans. As we make our way through this latest enrollment period, our mission is to ensure more African Americans have the information they need to make informed choices about their healthcare. Ultimately, we know this will help lead to a higher overall quality of life.

Patricia A. Maryland, Dr.PH, is the president of Healthcare Operations and Chief Operating Officer for Ascension Health.

Black Love and Unity Should be the New Normal

If ever there was a time we needed to turn back the hands of time and return to a place where there was a strong sense of Black love and Black unity, that time is now.

I remember growing up and listening to songs like “Say it Loud — I'm Black and I'm Proud,” by the phenomenally talented and extremely gifted James Brown.

I watched the movie *Get on Up*, which chronicled the life and career of James Brown. In the movie, the part of the movie where he introduced the song to America stood out to me. The power of those eight words — “Say it Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud” — gave Black people a newfound self-confidence in 1968 that they had not had before.

That is an example of Black love and Black unity.

I remember walking through the halls of my elementary school, and witnessing my African American male principal lead our predominately African American student body in an empowerment chant, whereby he told every student to chant, “Black is Beautiful.”

There was something about knowing that there was nothing wrong with me making that declaration for the whole world to hear, and knowing that I was special. There



Jeffrey L. Boney

NNPA
Columnist

was something about feeling supported and protected by someone else who looked like me and who could relate to me and my experiences.

That is an example of Black

“It is time for us to start effectively communicating with one another — with a foundation of Black love and Black unity leading the way

love and Black unity.

Those were the days, but many of us feel we can't re-establish the type of Black love and Black unity we once displayed and embraced. It's time to return to Black love and unity. Let's refer to it as “The New Normal.”

We need to revisit this mentality amongst ourselves and watch what happens when we make the decision to reinstate something that has helped make our communities great once before — economically, socially, politically, emotionally, spiritually, etc.

Black people are not quitters. Black people are creative. Black people know how to be resourceful.

If history has taught us anything, it's that us working together collaboratively in love and unity is the only way that Black people are going to progress and achieve peace and equality in this country.

As a people, we must stop showing hatred toward one another. At the heart of most issues, conflict and hate-filled

As a people, we must both, LOVE our youth and once again UNITE to teach our youth and help bridge the gap between them and our elders.

As a people, we must both LOVE our history and once again UNITE our minds with the knowledge of our history and embracing our culture.

Once again, it is time for us to return to Black love and Black unity — that is, if we really want to see our communities return to the strength, pride and prominence it once experienced. Without Black love and Black unity, the Black race as we know it in America is doomed. Let's make a decision to make Black love and Black unity “The New Normal” right now and moving forward.

Jeffrey L. Boney serves as Associate Editor and is an award-winning journalist for the *Houston Forward Times* newspaper. Jeffrey is a frequent contributor on the *Nancy Grace Show* and has a daily radio talk show called *Real Talk with Jeffrey L. Boney*. He is a Next Generation Project Fellow, dynamic, international speaker, experienced entrepreneur, business development strategist and Founder/CEO of the *Texas Business Alliance*. If you would like to request Jeffrey as a speaker, you can reach him at jboney1@forwardtimes.com.

actions in the Black community, is a lack of love and a lack of unity. It is time for us to start effectively communicating with one another — with a foundation of Black love and Black unity leading the way.

As a people, we must both, have a LOVE for God and once again UNITE ourselves to God.

As a people, we must both, LOVE our community and once again UNITE as a community.

As a people, we must both, LOVE our people and once again UNITE as a people.