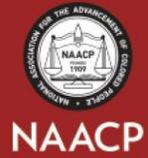




THE BLACK CHURCH & HIV THE SOCIAL JUSTICE IMPERATIVE



Achieving Health Equity and Combating HIV

At the core of the initiative's mission and vision is the fight for equal rights, which directly impacts health equity for the Black community.

Faith leaders in the Black community have historically influenced, promoted, and supported political change. Today, the HIV/AIDS epidemic demands that our faith leaders use their power to confront this terrible health disparity. By giving a voice to people who feel as if they have been forgotten, *The Black Church and HIV* initiative's partnership with faith leaders will continue to inspire significant confidence and change in our communities.

What is social justice?

Social justice is the equitable distribution of social, economic and political resources, opportunities, and responsibilities and their consequences. It affects the way people live, their chance of illness, and their risk of premature death. Social justice is the sustained commitment to create a society based on equality and fairness for all people. It calls for fair and equal treatment of the "haves" and the "have not's." The social justice movement is centered on fighting all forms of oppression, discrimination, and disenfranchisement. It calls for systemic change of governments, policies, and practices that empower all people to live healthy and productive lives. Health equity means social justice in health (i.e., no one is denied the possibility to be healthy for belonging to a group that has historically been economically/socially disadvantaged).

The Black Church and HIV is addressing HIV in the Black community from a social justice perspective, understanding that it is critical for us to reach out and collaborate with institutions that have traditionally served as the supporters of civil rights and justice in our community. Framing HIV as a social justice issue means letting our people know about health disparities. The social justice component is important when engaging our communities because it lets them see the urgency of the situation. Not only must we share the injustice of HIV but we must also use the social justice framework to teach the solution. Fighting a health issue such as HIV is not an individual battle; it's a fight that requires a unified and sustained response.

We know with increased knowledge about HIV, and with a view of this issue from a spiritual and biblical perspective, faith leaders and their churches will be able to adopt some of the strategies outlined in *The Black Church and HIV: the Social Justice Imperative* manual. As in the Civil Rights era, the combined efforts of Black Church faith leaders and the initiative will uplift the Black community, improve the conditions in which we live, and ultimately overcome the adverse effects of the HIV epidemic.

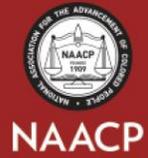
What is health equity?

Health equity is achieving the highest level of health for all people, meaning everyone has the same opportunity to live a long, healthy life. It implies that health should not be compromised or disadvantaged because of an individual or population group's race, ethnicity, gender, income, sexual orientation, neighborhood or other social condition. Health equity is important because everyone deserves a fair chance to lead a healthy life. No one should be denied this chance because of who they are or their socio-economic opportunities.





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Health equity entails focused societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities by equalizing the conditions for health for all groups, especially for those who have experienced socioeconomic disadvantage or historical injustices. There are great disparities in health, access to quality health care, and insurance coverage due to race and socioeconomic status in the United States. These health disparities are known as “social determinants” of health, which are inequalities that can be avoided. Within the context of HIV, health equity means that instead of an individual’s health outcome being determined by his or her employment status, income level, and/or ZIP code, the individual is provided with the same fair opportunities (i.e. access to HIV testing, treatment, and support) as their counterparts to live a long, healthy life.

Some population groups, in particular African Americans, continue to be disproportionately affected by HIV. African Americans have the highest rates of HIV and are more likely to die from HIV/AIDS than any other race or ethnicity. Environmental factors, such as housing conditions, social networks, and social support are key drivers of HIV, and discrimination and racism worsen the disparate impact of HIV on African Americans. These factors help shape a context of vulnerability that either contributes to increased individual risk of exposure to HIV or compromises the ability to protect oneself from infection.

Through our advocacy efforts, *The Black Church and HIV* hopes to raise the political voice of our communities as it pertains to the policies that affect health equity and access to HIV prevention, testing, treatment, and care.

Economic Equality

HIV and health equity, socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the most significant social determinants of access to health care (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2008). More importantly, it is about the many interrelated issues that people of low-income face — complicated life logistics, perceived hierarchy of need, violence, and lower levels of education, among other factors — all of which could lead to stress and any number of associated health risks. Since many Blacks are more likely to be of lower economic status, without significant health and benefit plans, this situation is most certainly a social justice issue. We must advocate for conditions that allow our people to engage in HIV prevention and care which enables them to take an active role in their overall health.

Key Resource: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/>