



**Recommendations for HIV/AIDS Policy**  
**for**  
**Black Women and Girls and their Families Living with and Affected by HIV/AIDS**

**Submitted by the National Black Women's HIV/AIDS Network**  
**to the**  
**Administration of President-Elect Barack Obama**

**Our Mission**

The National Black Women's HIV/AIDS Network's (NBWHAN) mission is to be a voice and advocate for Black women and girls living with or affected by HIV/AIDS by engaging in policy and program initiatives that fight gender, social and health inequities.

**Our Preamble:**

As a coalition of Black women and girls, we demand the opportunity and have inherited the right to speak on behalf of Black women and girls in the United States of America.

- We demand to be treated with respect and dignity that is our affirmation, and we will no longer allow others to define us.
- We have value and worth, and are worth saving; we bring an inestimable human value to the world society.
- We are local, national, political, social welfare, policy, community based, God fearing and inspired women.
- We are women who are HIV positive, women with AIDS and women with no infection at all, who understand that when one of us has AIDS we all have AIDS, and when one of us dies we all die.
- We will not tolerate the death of another one of our children and will develop and implement the strategies that will save them.
- We have been and will remain the Drum Majors for social justice in HIV/AIDS and will sound the public health alarm for our people.

**Our Guiding Principles:**

- We matter. Our lives are worth it.



- We are validated as women in the eyes of the Creator (how one feels about themselves directly determines their behavior).
- In order to make a difference, we must change the way we see ourselves deep inside to make a difference for someone else.
- We will be there, when prior to us there was no one to depend on.
- We are moving into a higher level of consciousness, action, commitment, and urgency because black women are dying.
- We are the gatekeepers of the community and family and if we die, our community dies.
- We take ownership and use our voice to be the force of change.
- The lives of black adolescents and young adults depend on our willingness to create new strategies.
- Above all, this is an issue of social justice.

The NBWHAN has been successful in working with many advocacy groups as well as local and national organizations to garner support for Black women's and girl's issues in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Founded in 2007 the NBWHAN has worked to influence the development of research initiatives and resources that will have a positive impact on program development and design for women and girls and produce scientific based evidence of success. NBWHAN is a community led initiative born out of the urgent need for Black women to set and implement a national HIV/AIDS agenda for Black women and girls and their families in the areas of prevention, care, treatment, and public policy.

### The Need for a National Strategy that Addresses the Needs of Black Women and Girls and their Families Living with and Affected by HIV/AIDS in the United States

#### Background

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, at the end of 2006, more than 1 million people in the United States were living with HIV infection. In August 2008, the CDC released new HIV incidence data that shows an estimated 56,300 new HIV infections occurred in 2006. The data further shows that the majority of these new infections occurred among Black Americans.

Women account for more than one quarter of all new HIV/AIDS diagnoses in the United States and the HIV prevalence rate among Black women is 19 times the rate of white women. Historically, women have been underrepresented in HIV/AIDS research, and underserved in HIV/AIDS treatment, care and prevention efforts. The neglect of women's complex health issues, as they relate to HIV disease, such as biological differences in the ways HIV affects men and women, social and economic inequities, and environmental factors, has led, in part, to a dramatic rise in the number of women living with HIV, and an alarming increase in AIDS-related deaths among women. The research community as evidenced by a long history of research and prevention efforts that focused on men only has consequently underestimated these factors, along with perceptions of vulnerability to HIV infection among women.



In 2004 (the most recent year for which data are available), HIV infection was the leading cause of death for black women aged 25–34 years, the third leading cause of death for black women aged 35–44 years, the fourth leading cause of death for black women aged 45–54 years. Today, women account for more than one quarter of all new HIV/AIDS diagnoses.

Factors placing women at risk for HIV infection include lack of awareness and recognition of partner’s risk factors, high-risk heterosexual contact, and lack of skills to negotiate safe sex practices, biologic vulnerability and co-morbid sexually transmitted diseases. Substance use and mental health issues are also been identified as barriers to prevention efforts.

The NBWHAN has identified the following recommendations for action by the Obama Administration to address Black women and girls and their families living with and affected by HIV/AIDS.

### **Recommendations for Action**

#### **1. Support HIV-positive and non-positive Black women and girls and their organizations and networks**

- Listen respond to and include the voices and demands of HIV-positive and non-positive Black women and girls in efforts to bring about needed change in policies, strategies, laws and funding for national and community-based initiatives.
- Monitor resource allocations specifically for programs and initiatives designed to respond to the needs of Black women and girls in prevention, treatment, care education and gender-based violence,
- Ensure the participation of HIV-positive and non-positive Black women and girls in decision making, at the highest levels so that outcomes reflect the realities of their needs

#### **2. Ensure equal access to care, treatment and health insurance coverage**

- Develop strategies to improve access to health care for Black women and girls and their families, including HIV-positive Black women and girls and their families.
- Strengthen and expand sexual and reproductive health services and training for health care providers to provide HIV/AIDS treatment and prevention during routine screenings.
- Increase funding for mental health services and treatment. Encourage and support the development of collaborative efforts among providers to address the multi-layered complex issues of Black women and girls and their families.
- Ensure access to voluntary HIV counseling and testing that addresses stigma, discrimination and gender-based violence, encourage partner testing, and couples counseling.

#### **3. Ensure that Black women and girls and their families have the knowledge and means to prevent HIV infection**

- Empower Black women and girls to stay HIV-negative by redefining the current definitions of high risk to include economic, social, and political factors, which continue to place Black women at greater risk of HIV/AIDS,



- Release gender and culturally specific social marketing campaigns targeting Black women and girls and their families,
- Provide HIV prevention in all health care settings and comprehensive sex education in schools.

#### **4. Ensure that Black women and girls have access to research**

- Increase funding and support for research to increase general knowledge of “gender specific” risks and then incorporate these findings into prevention messages that speak directly to Black women and girls in the U.S.
- Increase funding for research, and community education and awareness of self determined prevention methods such as microbicides
- Increase funding and research into the appropriate role and engagement of faith based organizations.
- Increase funding for research to develop effective behavioral and biomedical interventions with a particular focus on Black women and girls.
- Increase funding and support for programs that focus on cultural competency, community-based outreach, and access to care specifically geared towards Black women and girls.

#### Conclusion

The decrease in mother-to-child HIV transmission is a public health achievement in HIV prevention in the United States. This success was realized by using multiple interventions, partnerships with state and local health departments, communities, and providers, communities. Most importantly, the effort to decrease mother-to-child transmission included collaboration across government agencies, which provided a unified public health infrastructure dedicated to stem the tide of HIV/AIDS infection among infants. The NBWHAN call upon the Obama Administration to examine the various aspects of this model and incorporate these measures in formulating a response for specialized HIV prevention, treatment and care, research strategies, and programs to address the immediate and ongoing health needs of Black women and girls and their families impacted by HIV/AIDS.