



For Immediate Release

Leading Medical Groups Call on Congress to Help Close the Chronic Disease Gap in Minority Populations

National Minority Health Month Raises Awareness of the Importance of Research and Prevention in Helping to Achieve Health Equity

(Washington, DC) April 27, 2012 — The American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN), the Association of Black Cardiologists (ABC), the American Gastroenterological Association (AGA) and the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE) have joined forces to call on Congress to help close the chronic disease gap among minorities by strengthening the public-private partnerships that raise public awareness and understanding about health inequality.

Life expectancy and overall health have improved in recent years for most Americans, thanks in part to new advances in medicine and preventive care. However, racial and ethnic minorities still lag behind in many health outcome measures.

“Disparities in health, particularly cancer, continue to be evidenced by later stage disease among populations, higher mortality rates — or death — from cancer, and increased suffering when facing the disease,” said Angelina Esparza, director of health equity, American Cancer Society. “An additional 60,000 deaths among adults ages 25 to 64 could be prevented if we could achieve health equity, which includes promoting prevention and early detection. We need to do more to close the gap.”

With a greater commitment of federal funding, a larger focus can be dedicated to identifying underlying factors, building community support, and creating multidisciplinary prevention initiatives that can significantly improve the health of individuals, families, and communities most impacted by poor health and premature death.

“The burden of hepatitis C infection is highest in minority populations, especially African-Americans, but their response to treatment has been suboptimal,” stated Andrea Reid, MD, from the American Gastroenterological Association and the Washington, DC VA Medical Center. “More research is needed to improve treatment options and clinical outcomes.”

ACS CAN, ABC, AGA and ASGE believe that Congress should continue to support government organizations, such as the National Institutes of Health, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality so serious disparities that exist with many diseases can be adequately addressed, including through programs and initiatives

designed to improve health-care quality and outcomes, enhance consumer choice, advance patient safety, improve efficiency, reduce medical errors, and broaden access to essential services.

According to Marta Davila, MD, spokesperson, American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy and The University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, “colorectal cancer is largely preventable. One of the most fundamental things that we can do to reduce the disproportionately high rates of colorectal cancer in minority populations is to ensure that people have access to colorectal cancer screenings. However, guaranteed access to colorectal cancer screening alone is not enough. Support for culturally sensitive education and outreach initiatives designed and implemented at the community level are necessary if we are to reach the goal of an 80 percent screening rate in all Americans age 50 and older.”

The cost of doing nothing is too high. A study commissioned by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies and published in 2009 found that more than 30 percent of direct medical costs faced by African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans were excess costs due to health inequities — more than \$230 billion over a three-year period. When indirect costs of these inequities over the same period are added, the cost is \$1.24 trillion.

"African Americans still lag behind other patients in terms of receiving appropriate care for their cardiovascular needs," according to Dr. Ola Akinboboye, president, the Association of Black Cardiologists. "Health-care coverage, while very important, does not alone address the numerous factors that contribute to health-care inequities."

Disparities in health due to race and ethnicity can be overcome. Prevention can make a vital contribution to current efforts to reduce disparities in health. By addressing the underlying factors that negatively influence health, prevention has the power to reduce the incidence of poor health and premature death.

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About ACS CAN

ACS CAN, the nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy affiliate of the American Cancer Society, supports evidence-based policy and legislative solutions designed to eliminate cancer as a major health problem. ACS CAN works to encourage elected officials and candidates to make cancer a top national priority. ACS CAN gives ordinary people extraordinary power to fight cancer with the training and tools they need to make their voices heard. For more information, visit www.acscan.org.

About the American Gastroenterological Association

The American Gastroenterological Association is the trusted voice of the GI community. Founded in 1897, the AGA has grown to include 17,000 members from around the globe who are involved in all aspects of the science, practice and advancement of gastroenterology. The

AGA Institute administers the practice, research and educational programs of the organization.
www.gastro.org.

About the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy

Since its founding in 1941, the American Society for Gastrointestinal Endoscopy (ASGE) has been dedicated to advancing patient care and digestive health by promoting excellence in gastrointestinal endoscopy. ASGE, with more than 12,000 members worldwide, promotes the highest standards for endoscopic training and practice, fosters endoscopic research, recognizes distinguished contributions to endoscopy, and is the foremost resource for endoscopic education. Visit www.asge.org and www.screen4coloncancer.org for more information and to find a qualified doctor in your area.

About the Association of Black Cardiologists

Founded in 1974, the Association of Black Cardiologists, Inc., (ABC) is a nonprofit organization with an international membership of 2,500 health professionals, lay members of the community (Community Health Advocates), corporate members, and institutional members. The ABC is dedicated to eliminating the disparities related to cardiovascular disease in all people of color.