

Celebrating Black History Month With Greater Access to Health Care

Every February, in recognition of Black History Month, we celebrate the achievements of our community and the advances that have been made in moving toward full racial equality. We honor our ancestors, many of whom include the giants of the Civil Rights movement whose work still affects us today. At the same time, Black History Month reminds us that there is still more to be done, especially when it comes to equality in health care.

In the U.S. today, we as African-American women face numerous barriers to accessing health care that would improve our lives, our families, and our community. Particularly in the South, many people do not have access to affordable, high-quality health care. As a result, African-American women are dying at higher rates than their white counterparts due to breast cancer, cervical cancer, HIV, and other illnesses. These are conditions that when detected early can often be treated or managed; however, these much-needed services are often inaccessible to those who can't afford it. This is why we at Planned Parenthood work to play an active role in helping individuals overcome these barriers by providing no to low-cost reproductive and sexual

health care for all people regardless of income.

Additionally, the Affordable Care Act has laid the groundwork to provide nearly 6.8 million uninsured African Americans the opportunity for affordable health insurance. This is critical to the wellness of our community because African Americans are 55 percent more likely to be uninsured than whites — a staggering gap that we can reduce by making sure people know their options under the Affordable Care Act and have the information and tools they need to enroll in new health insurance plans.

Planned Parenthood is here to serve the community, not only as health care providers, but as a resource, informing the community about the Affordable Care Act. We support the Affordable Care Act for many reasons, not the least of which is that under the ACA, insured Americans have access to critical preventive health care services such as wellness exams and contraception without copays. And people cannot be denied coverage based on pre-existing conditions like being HIV-positive, having breast cancer, or being a victim of domestic violence.

The African-American adage “each one teach one” is a call to stand together and share

pertinent information to help improve the lives of every person in the African-American community. At Planned Parenthood of the Pacific Southwest, we take this responsibility seriously by standing with our community partners to ensure that those eligible for coverage under the ACA are informed and become enrolled.

The history of the reproductive justice movement is as complicated as the nation's, but throughout our history, Planned Parenthood and the African-American community have worked together to break down barriers to health care access posed by poverty, racism, and politics. We do this because we believe that all people deserve high-quality, affordable health care — no matter who they are and where they live. We believe that when people are truly cared for, they make their lives, families, and communities stronger.



Alisha Wilkins