

Minority and Multicultural Health Month Kickoff
Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital
September 1, 2010

Intro

Thank you for joining us today as we begin our annual celebration of September as Minority and Multicultural Health Month here in New Jersey. Thank you to the South Asian Total Health Initiative (SATHI) for hosting this excellent program. I am so glad we could all be here today, standing together as a unified force committed to health equity for all.

Today we kickoff a month full of health fairs, screenings and educational events that will be held throughout the month to raise awareness about health disparities and to educate residents on the steps they can take to manage their health.

Minority & Multicultural Health Month

Each September, the Department of Health and Senior Services' Office of Minority and Multicultural Health promotes Minority and Multicultural Health Month to raise awareness of minority health issues and highlight the efforts of community and faith-based organizations, hospitals and other institutions to reduce disparities.

This year we have 50 community based-organizations and healthcare agencies holding events across the state to educate and inform New Jerseyans. This is a wonderful showing of support to create the linkages we need in minority communities. Although Governor Christie couldn't join us today, I know the Governor understands how essential health care is to all our residents and applauds your efforts to improve access to routine and preventive health care.

Working together we can increase awareness and demonstrate lifestyle changes that can be implemented in the daily lives of residents.

Our real objective is to empower our residents, our families and our neighbors to make changes that will improve their health and ultimately eliminate health disparities.

I encourage all New Jersey residents to take action to protect their health—this month and always—and take advantage of the many health fairs, screenings, workshops and seminars that are being held throughout September.

Healthy Me, Healthy Us!

This year's slogan, *Healthy Me, Healthy Us*, encourages residents – those of all cultural backgrounds, from the youngest to the oldest – to actively participate in their own health, and in the health of their families and communities. Routine and preventive health care is essential to the health of all residents and we must promote healthy lifestyles at all ages.

Events across the state will provide a range of services including childhood immunizations, childhood lead screening, stroke awareness sessions, blood pressure screenings and nutrition for older adults.

Working with our healthcare partners, we hope to raise awareness of the health concerns that arise from infancy through the senior years and the actions required to promote wellness and prevent disease throughout the life cycle.

Although our healthcare needs change as we age, we must continue to address them and protect our health.

A healthy New Jersey makes a strong New Jersey!

And that is what makes the work of the Department and our Office of Minority and Multicultural Health so critical. I have to recognize the excellent work of the Acting Director of the Office of Minority and Multicultural Health who is here with us today, Colette Lamothe-Galette. She and her team are at the core of what I view as one of our top priorities of the Department of Health and Senior Services: Reducing health disparities in minority and multi-cultural communities.

The Office does great work in:

- Promoting community health outreach and education through partnerships with community based organizations
- Working to improve health care access and services for minority populations;
- Improving methods for collecting and reporting data on minority health

Health Disparities

It was Benjamin Disraeli, the famed British Prime minister who said, “The health of the people is really the foundation upon which all their happiness and all their powers as a state depend.”

We are working day and night to improve the health of all our citizens, while recognizing there is always more work to be done, especially in our State’s minority communities.

New Jersey is similar to nation in that our minorities are at greater risk than whites for premature death and preventable disease

There are great disparities in death rates....

- Asthma death rates for African Americans are nearly 4 times higher compared to whites; Asthma death rates for Hispanics 1 & 1/2 times higher compared to whites

- Deaths from diabetes are nearly 3 times higher among Blacks and nearly 1&1/2 times higher among Hispanics compared Whites

There are great disparities in incidence of disease...

- Blacks have nearly 2 times higher diabetes prevalence than Whites.
- AIDS incidence rates are 16 times higher for Blacks and 5 times higher for Hispanics than Whites

Medical screening tests are critical to identifying health problems early when treatment outcomes are most favorable. Unfortunately, minority and multicultural communities are least likely to get these potentially lifesaving tests.

For example:

- Cervical Cancer screening rates are lower among Asian women compared to White women (66% vs. 81%, respectively)
- Prostate Cancer screening rates are lower among Asian men compared to White men (31% vs. 57%, respectively)

Despite all the strides we have made in improving access to routine and preventive care, minorities remain at greater risk for premature death and preventable disease and we simply must do better. That's why it is essential for the state to have partners to address and reduce health disparities.

SATHI

One of our partners, SATHI is the host of the event today. Last year we gave SATHI, a \$25,000 grant to teach individuals who have chronic conditions and their caregivers how to better manage their condition and its impact on their lives.

They are doing great work to bring health promotion education and disease awareness to the South Asian Community. Community partners are essential in reducing disparities. They know their community best and understand their needs and can communicate health information effectively.

Closing

Thanks to the partnership of these minority and multicultural groups, like SATHI, New Jerseyans have many opportunities to participate in events that can help them lead healthier lives.

Our commitment, creativity, ingenuity, collaboration and intellect will all be needed to reduce health disparities. As I look out at this sea of people—dedicated, smart, passionate and persistent—the future looks bright in your hands.

Thank you for collaborating with our Department to make such difference.

I encourage all of you to visit the department's web site, nj.gov/health to view the list of events across the state and attend events that promote healthy lifestyles and a healthier New Jersey.

Thank you for joining us today

Now I want to bring to the podium, a good friend of mine and a great champion for our residents and their health.....Assemblyman Upendra Chivukula.