



Apathy fueling black AIDS epidemic in U.S.

Adrienne Appel

The United States has slashed the AIDS death rate among white and wealthy U.S. citizens, but the disease continues to ravage the black community at full force, leaders say.

African Americans are 13 percent of the U.S. population but are 50 percent of those diagnosed with HIV each year and 50 percent of those who die of AIDS annually, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

"We are in a public health state of emergency in the African American community," said Debra Fraser-Howze, head of the National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS. "We have the highest rate of death among all illnesses and, on top of that, AIDS. ... HIV/AIDS looks the same in our community as it looks in some third world countries."

HIV is a virus that attacks the immune system and, if untreated, leads to AIDS. An otherwise healthy person may get infected with HIV and live for 10 years before experiencing any symptoms. When the body

begins to weaken from the infection, medicines called anti-retrovirals are given to help the body fight it.

About 32 million people worldwide have HIV/AIDS, according to recently revised figures from UNAIDS.

One million people in the United States are living with HIV/AIDS, and a steady 40,000 people each year are newly diagnosed, according to the CDC.

"For African Americans, HIV rates remain uncomfortably high. It's really simply alarming this late in the epidemic," said Carolyn Barley Britton, president-elect of the National Medical Association, an organization of black physicians.

Among whites and the well-to-do, people with HIV/AIDS are generally living 20 years and longer with the disease because of good medical care and access to anti-retroviral drugs, on the market since 1995, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation.

As a result, the average U.S. death rate due to AIDS has dropped 80 percent since the mid-1990s, according to the CDC.



Former South African President Nelson Mandela and his wife Graca Machel (right) arrive at the Nelson Mandela 46664 World AIDS Day Concert in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Saturday. (AP photo/Schalk van Zuydam)

But hidden behind this progress are numbers that describe an epidemic in full swing in the African American community in the U.S., leaders say.

Sixty-seven percent of women diagnosed with HIV are black, according to the CDC. Seventy percent of

young people diagnosed with HIV are black. And AIDS is the leading cause of death among young African American women. Among white women, it is the seventh leading cause of death.

As a result, young black women have grown up with HIV in their com-

munities.

"It is in their face," said Jennifer Augustine, director of HIV and STD prevention at Advocates for Youth, an organization focused on health issues.

At the same time, frank, com-
AIDS, continued to page 21

DSS commish: Black-owned firms will get a fair shake

Howard Manly

In response to charges that the state Department of Social Services (DSS) is discriminating against black-owned social service providers, DSS Commissioner Angelo McClain vowed to instill a sense of fair play throughout the agency and insisted

that those subcontractors engaging in discriminatory practices would have their state contracts terminated.

By the same token, McClain said that he would work with black-owned companies to insure that they meet all state standards and licensing requirements and provide further busi-

ness training to enable those firms to diversify their revenue streams and not depend solely on the DSS.

McClain has already met with members of the Black Mental Health Alliance who have claimed they are still not receiving a fair share of the multimillion-dollar referral business that helps troubled families.

"I have sent a clear message," McClain said, "that the department would expect companies doing business with the DSS not to discriminate," and if any are found doing so, they would be in "violation of their contracts."

But for some members of the Black Mental Health Alliance, that message has yet to trickle down.

In the three-month period that ended in June, for instance, the Osiris Group received a total of eight referrals, a small percentage of the estimated 1,200 referrals a month made under the DSS "Family Networks" service in the Greater Boston area.

The small percentage is particularly troublesome given DSS estimates that roughly 50 percent of their clients who need services are African American and Latino families, and

the agency's stated goal of developing community-based organizations and increasing their capacities.

Larry Higginbottom, a member of the Black Mental Health Alliance and founder of the Osiris Group, said that when he and other group members talked with McClain about their perceptions that they are being "systematically discriminated against," the commissioner agreed to investigate and put an end to any discriminatory practices.

"He was very responsive," Higginbottom said.

At issue is the DSS referral system. As it is now, the bulk of the referrals are made through "lead agencies" that have contracts with DSS. Those agencies — including The Home for Little Wanderers, Dimock Community Health Center,

DSS, continued to page 26

City Council hears St. Botolph tenants' fears

Jin-ah Kim

Responding to tenants' concerns, the Boston City Council's Committee on Housing held a public hearing last Thursday about Northeastern University's recent purchase of St. Botolph Terrace, a complex of affordable housing apartment units subsidized by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

State Sen. Dianne Wilkerson joined City Councilors Chuck Turner, Sam Yoon and Michael Ross at the Susan Bailis Assisted Living Center in the South End to listen to testimony from St. Botolph residents, as well as

representatives from Northeastern University and the Massachusetts Alliance of HUD Tenants (MAHT).

Despite the Council's official invitation, John Palmieri, the new director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA), did not attend the hearing, though a BRA staff member came to listen to the concerns in his place.

"We struggle hard for affordable family housing. It's a precious commodity," said Turner. "We are very concerned when the Boston Redevelopment Authority makes commitments to officials and to tenants in terms of their commitments to pre-

Tenants, continued to page 30



Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice poses for the official photo with the Kennedy Center Honorees for 2007 after dinner at the State Department in Washington on Saturday. (From left,

standing); Pianist Leon Fleisher and pop singers Diana Ross and Brian Wilson. (Seated): Humorist Steve Martin and filmmaker Martin Scorsese. (AP photo/Jose Luis Magana)

What's INSIDE

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT . . . 18-19
BILLBOARD 20

LISTINGS

BUSINESS DIRECTORY 28
CALENDAR 27
CHURCH GUIDE 29

PERSPECTIVE

EDITORIAL 4
OPINION 5
ROVING CAMERA 5

CLASSIFIEDS

HELP WANTED 32-35
LEGALS 30-31
REAL ESTATE 31-32