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April is Minority Health Month. What better time for Hoosiers to answer a call to action to help reduce health disparities in our state? Unfortunately, there is significant evidence of poor health status among racial/ethnic minority populations, with respect to premature death, preventable disease, and health care outcomes. For example, the infant death rate is 17.1 for African Americans and 9.0 for Hispanic/Latinos in Indiana, compared to 8.1 for Whites.

To help address the problems of health disparities in our state, I invite you to participate in activities for Minority Health Month and incorporate them into your daily lives throughout the year. The Office of Minority Health at the State Department of Health is hosting activities all over the state in April to raise awareness and to help communities form a plan of action to reduce health disparities. For example, health disparities workshops will be held in Elkhart, Evansville, and Fort Wayne, and cultural competency training will be offered in Merrillville. A calendar of events for Minority Health Month can be found on the State Department of Health Web site at: www.statehealth.IN.gov.

Like any public health challenge, the key to success in reducing health disparities is working together at the grassroots level. We need champions in each community to start addressing this problem by promoting healthy living. Eating well, moving more, and avoiding tobacco are important ways you can lead by example and help others to live healthier, longer lives.

The new National Action Agenda to End Health Disparities for Racial and Ethnic Minority Populations is dedicated to working with communities across the nation to offer outreach, technical assistance, and other supporting activities. Deputy Assistant Secretary for Minority Health Dr. Garth Graham from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services was in Indianapolis in February to discuss the National Action Agenda and to recognize Indiana's efforts to address the problem.

The Office of Minority Health at the State Department of Health is working closely with the Interagency State Council on Black and Minority Health, the Indiana Minority Health Coalition, the National Action Agenda, the Hispanic/Latino Commission, the Native American Commission, and other agencies, organizations, and businesses to address health disparities in the state. However, there is much that individuals can do, themselves.

Minorities are more likely to suffer from diabetes, stroke, and heart disease. The diabetes death rate for African Americans in Indiana is twice the rate for Whites. Although Hispanics/Latinos represent only 3.5 percent of the total population of Indiana, 2.3 percent of adult Hispanics/Latinos reported suffering from a stroke (the same percentage as Whites). It is very important that all Hoosiers, but especially for minorities to ask their doctor if they are at risk for serious health problems and how they can protect their health.

Eliminating health disparities is good for racial and ethnic minorities, good for the state, and good for our nation. As we move forward in our efforts to tackle this issue, we hope that the National Action Agenda will serve as a call to action for every Hoosier to do his or her part to reduce health disparities and lead our state to a healthier tomorrow.

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