



# Advocating for the Health of Our Communities



*Consumer Empowerment Agenda of the Network for a Healthy California—African American Campaign Advisory Council*



“While it is true that without a vision the people perish, it is doubly true that without action the people and their vision perish as well.”

*Johnetta B. Cole*

# Introduction



The poor health status of African Americans is well documented and cited frequently. African American mortality rates for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and many cancers exceed the rates of any other major racial/ethnic group. While the underlying causes for these health disparities include poverty, racism and disparities in health care quality, factors such as obesity, unhealthy dietary choices, and lack of physical activity are major risk factors for the onset of many of the conditions that underlie the high mortality rates of African



Americans. The *Network for a Healthy California—African American Campaign (African American Campaign)* was established to address these health disparities by:

**Empowering low-income African American families to make healthy food choices and be physically active through education, advocacy, and community empowerment.**

Guided by input and direction from the *African American Campaign Advisory Council (Council)*, the *African American Campaign* builds the capacity of African American consumers and organizations to be Champions for Change.

# Guiding Principles



In its deliberations, the Council adopted the following principles to guide the development of its priorities:

- Health policies must promote the elimination of health disparities among African Americans and other racial/ethnic groups.
- Prevention is the required strategy for eliminating those health disparities.
- Faith institutions and faith-based interventions are essential elements of an overall strategy to improve the health of African American communities.
- Community empowerment is a critical factor in building healthy African American communities.
- Healthy nutrition and physical activity strategies, programs, and policies specifically designed for and targeting African Americans are essential.
- Strategies, programs, and policies that target the general population must also be culturally competent and reflect the ethnic diversity of California.



# Policy Goals



The *African American Campaign* works to empower consumers by providing them with positive strategies to create healthier communities. Low-income consumers and partner agencies are encouraged to advocate for changes in alignment with the goals listed below to increase fruit and vegetable consumption and physical activity. These behaviors can help reduce the rates of serious health problems like obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer. The Council was strategic in its selection of priorities. It considered a wide variety of goals that would benefit African American communities and gave priority to those that were feasible given the resources and capacity of the Council. Accordingly, the Council adopted the following goals:

**Goal 1: Enhance the availability, variety, affordability, and quality of fruits and vegetables accessible to African Americans by increasing the number of retail outlets, farmers' markets, and other sources of healthy foods in our communities.**

City, county, special district, and other local agencies should use the zoning and economic development tools available to them to increase retail outlets that sell healthy foods and reduce the number of those selling foods with low nutritional value. Additionally, transportation planners should enhance transportation access to sources of healthy food.



**Goal 2: Increase access to fruits, vegetables, and other healthy foods by expanding the utilization of nutrition assistance programs, such**

**as WIC, Food Stamps, and school nutrition programs, in African American communities.**

Churches, community-based organizations, employers, health agencies, retailers, schools, and residents should provide ongoing education, create awareness and understanding on issues the community faces, and support policies, actions, and marketing campaigns implemented by city, county, and state government agencies that increase enrollment in nutrition assistance programs and reduce enrollment barriers.

**Goal 3: Increase the availability of safe places for physical activity by expanding community, school, and worksite opportunities for individuals and families to engage in physical activity.**

Parks and recreation, police, transportation, and other city and county agencies should use the tools available to them to increase the number and utilization of safe neighborhood parks, walking paths, exercise facilities, community gardens, and schools in low-income communities. In addition, they should ensure collaboration with local school districts, religious and private school governance bodies, employers, community-based organizations, and housing developers to create healthy communities where being physically active is both easy to do and socially supported.



## Policy Goals *continued...*



**Goal 4:** Enhance the role of public, private, religious schools (pre-school through 12th grade), and after school programs in promoting healthy eating and physical activity.

Public, private, and religious school governance bodies should adopt and enforce policies that promote the consumption of fresh fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods, restrict the availability of competing foods, strengthen nutrition education, and promote physical activity among students.

**Goal 5:** Increase the role of African American faith-based, community service, business, professional, media, health service providers,

and other organizations in promoting community awareness of the benefits of healthy eating and physical activity and promoting behavior changes.

African American churches, sororities and fraternities, economic development agencies, media, professional and advocacy organizations, and other community-based organizations should join the movement to promote healthy eating and physical activity by educating their members and constituents, serving healthy foods at their events, and promoting physical activity. They should also support advocacy efforts to create community and school environments that promote healthy eating and physical activity.

## About Us



The *Network for a Healthy California (Network)* is a statewide initiative led by the California Department of Public Health and administered in part by the Public Health Institute. The *Network* addresses key health issues that impact Californians: increasing fruit and vegetable consumption, increasing physical activity, decreasing food insecurity, and preventing chronic diseases. The *Network* involves over 130 organizations across the state in empowering low-income adults and children to eat more fruits and vegetables and be more physically active through a combination of education, promotion, advertising, and community change efforts.

The *Network for a Healthy California—African American Campaign* is one of five targeted campaigns within the *Network*, and it is guided by input and direction from the Council. The Council's membership consists of concerned California residents, community leaders, ministers, registered dietitians, nurses, doctors, physical activity professionals, and advocates.



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The Food Stamp Program provides nutrition assistance to people with low income. It can help buy nutritious foods for a better diet. For information on the Food Stamp Program, call 1-888-328-3483.



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