Smoking — today, it is the most preventable cause of death among African-Americans. More than 45,000 African-Americans die each year due to smoking-related diseases. Yet because it can be prevented, African-Americans should not be dying at this devastating rate. So how can smoking be stopped?

The National African American Tobacco Education Network (NAATEN) believes the solution starts with open conversation. It also believes in designing and implementing tobacco-prevention programs. NAATEN works with national organizations, churches and community leaders to share information on the harmful health effects of smoking and secondhand smoke.

NAATEN was established in 2000. It is a program of the Health Education Council. Its purpose is to help reduce the number of African American smokers and decrease tobacco-related illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, cancer and emphysema.

“This is a social justice issue. Smoking and its related diseases can be prevented. We just need to get into our communities anti-smoking initiatives that are supported by policy makers,” said Cynthia Robinson, NAATEN program coordinator.

Pastors and church leaders help spread this message by taking part in the Free-inded Tobacco Tools for the African-American Church. This program teaches clergy and other church leaders how to talk about the health risks of smoking, the dangers of secondhand smoke, the benefits of quitting smoking and the importance of being an activist for the cause.

“Most people are very intelligent. If you give them appropriate information about their health, they’ll make good decisions. That’s what NAATEN does,” said Bishop Sherwood C. Carthen, the network chairman of stakeholders. He also is the senior pastor at Bayside of South Sacramento Church. He often shares the anti-tobacco message with members and policy makers. NAATEN successfully works to declare churches as tobacco-free zones, engages youth to promote smoking bans in public places and works to make quitting tobacco more relevant for African Americans.

NAATEN also brings together nontraditional partners to help spread the anti-tobacco message. These are groups that have strong ties to the African American community and include health organizations such as the National Black Nurses Association, National Dental Association and the National Medical Association, as well as sororities and fraternities of the historically black colleges and universities.

“Groups such as these have broad community contacts nationwide. By partnering with them, we are able to reach a much larger audience,” said Carthen. “These groups have helped bring our tools and resources to Tennessee, Nebraska, Michigan, Mississippi, Louisiana, Indiana, California and Arizona, to name a few.”

NAATEN also reaches out to youth. Research shows that 80 percent of all smokers start smoking before age 18. African American youth tend to smoke the most heavily advertised mentholated brands, according to Robinson. “Menthol cigarette advertising more than tripled from 1998 to 2005 in low-income communities and neighborhoods with large African American populations,” she said. Menthol cigarettes are known to be more harmful than nonmenthol cigarettes because they may cause a higher level of nicotine dependence.

“African American youth tend to be more vulnerable to the lure of cigarettes because they are a less obvious addiction than alcohol or drugs.”

Tobacco Education Network
National African American
Tobacco Education Network

A PROGRAM OF THE HEALTH EDUCATION COUNCIL
WEST SACRAMENTO, CA

We want you to know

NAATEN
Chairman of Stakeholders
Bishop Sherwood C. Carthen

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Health Tips

✔ Do not smoke — it is harmful to you and the people around you.
✔ Advocate for smoke-free environments everywhere.
✔ Quitting smoking has almost immediate health benefits.
✔ Call 1-800-QUIT-NOW to learn more about these benefits and to receive free cessation support.

AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY CALENDAR

sun mon tues wed thurs fri sat

JULY 2009

1 1990: Frederick Douglas named U.S. Minister to Walk.
2 1962: Ghana gains independence from Great Britain.
3 1991: 5 women's singles title at Wimbledon.
4 1899: Frederick Douglass named U.S. Minister to Walk.
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