

D.C. Women Get "Heart Smart" With

Unison Health Plan Program



HERE'S A QUIZ you don't want to fail. True or false: women are less likely to suffer from heart disease than men. If you answered "true," you're wrong – but you're in good company. According to the American Heart Association (AHA), more than half of American women underestimate their heart disease risk. The idea that heart disease is a man's problem is persistent, and

for many years even the experts shared that view.

Now we know that heart disease is the leading cause of death for American women. In fact, it kills more than half a million women each year in the United States alone, more than the next seven causes of death combined. That's nearly twice the number of deaths due to all forms of cancer, including breast cancer, according to the AHA.

Though family history is a strong indicator of heart disease, many other signs or "risk factors" such as high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, weight gain from poor diet and lack of exercise are important. Although heart disease affects all women, African-American and Latino women in particular have some of the highest rates of the major risk factors for heart disease, including obesity, physical inactivity, high blood pressure, tobacco use and diabetes. In 2009, a report by the Kaiser Family Foundation found that African American women in the District suffer from heart disease, obesity, diabetes and generally poor health at alarmingly high numbers.

This spring, Unison Health Plan of the Capital Area, a UnitedHealth Group company, will launch a community-wide initiative to address the prevalence of heart disease and health dispar-

The Heart Smart Sisters Initiative will focus on heart disease education and outreach to African American and Latino women in high-risk Washington D.C. neighborhoods.

ties among African-American and Latino women in the District of Columbia.

The Heart Smart Sisters initiative will focus on heart disease education and outreach to African-American and Latino women in high-risk Washington, D.C. neighborhoods who suffer from heart related chronic health conditions. The ***Heart Smart Sisters*** initiative will educate women about the risk factors for developing heart disease and empower them to make the necessary lifestyle changes to improve their individual health status and reduce the overall incidence of heart disease in their community.

"Research indicates that there is an alarmingly high rate of heart disease, obesity, diabetes and generally poor health among African-American and Latino women in the District," said Charlisa Watson, Execu-

tive Director of Unison Health Plan of the Capital Area, which provides high-quality, diversified health services aimed at helping agencies facilitate care for the economically impoverished, the medically underserved and those without the benefit of employer-funded health care coverage. "Considering how heart disease disproportionately affects women of color, we created the ***Heart Smart Sisters*** initiative to evoke change and raise awareness in areas of our community that are most vulnerable to this health epidemic."

The initiative will include a year-long program of targeted outreach to community groups, civic and faith-based organizations in targeted Wards in the District through a series of educational events, community Town Hall meetings and health screenings. A citywide launch event will also be held this spring with District health officials, city council members, Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) leadership and other key collaborators.

Led by Unison Health Plan of the Capital Area, the ***Heart Smart Sisters*** initiative is supported by several strategic partners including Novo Nordisk Pharmaceuticals, the YWCA of the National Capital Area, Greater Washington Urban League, Latino Federation of Greater Washington, and community-based health providers throughout the District.

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