

Patient Advocates Address Cancer Disparities

One of the many ways in which patient advocates are addressing cancer health disparities is by increasing community engagement in cancer research. Over the past two decades, patient advocates have expanded their partnership with cancer researchers to fund disparities research, improve awareness regarding cancer risks and prevention, enhance the participation of minorities in clinical trials, and work with Capitol Hill to develop novel policies to reduce cancer health disparities. Selected examples of the partnerships among patient advocates, cancer researchers, and legislators that aim to drive progress against cancer health disparities are highlighted here:



The **Prostate Cancer Foundation** partnered with the **National Cancer Institute** and the **National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities** to launch the largest coordinated research effort to study biological and nonbiological factors associated with aggressive prostate cancer in African American men. The project is called **Research on Prostate Cancer in Men of African Ancestry: Defining the Roles of Genetics, Tumor Markers, and Social Stress (RESPOND)**.

Working together, patient advocates and investigators aim to enroll 10,000 African American men with prostate cancer into RESPOND to investigate environmental and genetic factors that will help us better understand why African American men disproportionately experience aggressive disease when compared with men of other racial and ethnic groups.



In the breast cancer community, the past two decades have brought about the formation of powerful national and local African American breast cancer advocacy organizations, such as **Sisters Network, Inc., Black Women's Health Imperative, African American Breast Cancer Alliance and African American Breast Cancer Coalition**. These organizations have been successful at raising public and political awareness, calling attention to improved accountability for quality care and policies, and elevating cancer health disparities as a public health priority. These awareness efforts have also encouraged new funding streams for breast cancer disparities research. The **Breast Cancer Foundation** and the **Susan G. Komen Foundation** have funded close to \$100 million in research programs to end breast cancer disparities and secure health equity for all breast cancer patients.



Colorectal patient advocates, minority health care organizations, and medical associations have been working with local and federal legislators to help address racial and ethnic disparities, with a focus on screening and outcomes. In 2002, seeking to address disparities in colorectal cancer among African Americans, the **Delaware Cancer Consortium**, which includes patient advocates, cancer researchers, oncologists, and representatives from government agencies, worked with state legislators to create a statewide colorectal cancer screening program that paid for screening and treatment and made patient navigators available to coordinate screening and cancer care. By 2009, this program had eliminated disparities in screening rates, reduced the percentage of African Americans diagnosed with advanced cancer, and almost completely abolished racial and ethnic differences in colorectal cancer incidence and mortality.