

Phi Beta Sigma Launches Conversation Among Brothers Series through Collegiate Chapter Campuses Across the Country to Combat HIV/AIDS

A year ago Sigma announced its partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in a call to arms in a heightened awareness campaign to combat HIV/AIDS. The multi-faceted program was an educational and awareness program, with heavy emphasis on testing African American men in African American communities. At that time, Sigma put on the table a program for funding that would focus HIV/AIDS awareness education and testing in localized urban communities that focused on African American males ages 18-25. Those areas were our college campus across the country.

This month the fraternity launches the Conversation Among Brothers Series (CABS). This community-based program will help raise awareness regarding HIV/AIDS and challenge chapters of Phi Beta Sigma to take responsibility for educating the community on the impact HIV/AIDS is having on the African American community.

CABS is an initiative targeting African American college men on college campuses. It is designed to encourage ongoing peer-to-peer discussions about topics and issues that adversely impact African American men, particularly HIV/AIDS. Recognizing the alarming number of African American men between the ages of 18 and 25 that are infected with the disease, Sigma is taking a proactive position to help address this community matter of urgency. Our local chapters will facilitate ongoing dialogue amongst brothers on college campus. In addition to the aware, the local chapters are encouraging African American men to get tested and become advocates for HIV/AIDS testing.

According to John White, International Director of Social Action, "The statistics from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention should serve as a deafening wake up call to our communities." African Americans have more illness (even though blacks account for about 13% of the U.S. population, we account for about half - 49% - of the people who get HIV and Aids), shorter survival times (Blacks with AIDS often don't live as long as people of other races and ethnic groups with AIDS), and more deaths (for African Americans and other blacks, HIV/AIDS is a leading cause of death).

According to the CDC, African American males under the age of 25 comprise a disproportionate 61% of the 18,849 people under age of 25 whose diagnosis was reported during 2001-2004 from the 33 states with HIV reporting (see CDC HIV/AIDS Fact Sheet at <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/aa/resources/factsheets/aa.htm>). Thirty-six chapters have been identified as core sponsors to implement CABS:

Alabama A&M University, Alcorn State University, Arizona State University, California State University/Long Beach, California State/Los Angeles, California State/San Bernardino, Chicago State University, Costa Carolina University, Dillard University, Florida A&M University, Florida State University, Howard University, Jackson State University, Johnson C. Smith University, Livingston College, Louisiana State University, Louisville Metro Chapter, Medgar Evers College, Mississippi Valley State University, Morehouse College, Morgan State University, North Carolina A&T State University, Prairie View A&M University, Rowan University, Rutgers University, Southern University,

Southern University - New Orleans, Temple University, Tennessee State University, University of Arkansas - Pine Bluff, University of California/Davis, University of MA/Amherst, University of Memphis, University of Michigan, Virginia State University, Winthrop University

These chapters will conduct a minimum of 3 town meeting sessions, aimed at 150 individuals per session. The sessions for include dialoging and educational materials and presentations regarding HIV/AIDS. The total reach of this vital program is projected to be approximately 15,000 African American males.

CABS content on each campus will include:

- 3 sessions led by a moderator/speaker serving as a main attraction for the event (moderators will be selected based on their ability to draw and engage audiences),
- Distribution of educational materials on the causes of HIV and AIDS, prevention measures, information regarding medications and treatment,
- Distribution of marketing materials regarding HIV/AIDS and the CABS,
- Coordination and reporting of the events on campus, and
- Partnerships with medical agencies for purposes of on-site HIV/AIDS testing

Phi Beta Sigma's commitment to HIV/AIDS awareness is not limited to Black HIV/AIDS Day (February 7, 2009), but on this day and during this month of Black History, there is a heightened awareness and a commitment to partner in the community to ensure the success of HIV/AIDS awareness and testing. Chapters and the public can contact the Program Director through the Fraternity's international website at www.pbs1914.org for additional information, and for the details of the Conversation Among Brothers Series.

In addition to the service on Black HIV/AIDS Day and the rollout of the Conversation Among Brothers Series, the fraternity will conduct HIV/AIDS testing at 5 of the upcoming regional conferences: March 5 in Las Vegas, Nevada; March 27 in Charlotte, North Carolina; April 2 in Little Rock, Arkansas; April 9 in Galveston, Texas; April 16 in North Lauderdale, Florida; and April 24 in Washington, DC. Also, there will be a major forum as well as testing at the New Orleans Conclave this summer. For actual times and locations, visit the international website.

In addition to the CABS, chapters can obtain additional materials and resources for HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns/programming through the Strategic Leadership Council (partnership of organizations working with the CDC). They have established a website containing a tremendous amount of tools and resources, not only for the Brothers of Phi Beta Sigma, but for anyone who is interested in this necessary and vital effort to help save our communities.

For more information on National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, log onto www.blackaidsday.org.

Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, founded 1914 at Howard University, continues to champion the cause for equality and equal justice, the world over, in an effort to continue the legacy of our illustrious Founders, perpetuating Culture for Service, and Service for Humanity.