

Contact: Christina Borrego, RIESTER, cborrego@riester.com

New campaign seeks to reverse dire infant-mortality rates among African-American population in Arizona

PHOENIX (November 20, 2009) — Arizona's alarming infant mortality rate among African-Americans is the catalyst behind a new campaign designed to address health challenges among the state's African-American population with an eye toward improving health outcomes in future generations.

The public awareness effort, *Live It Change It*, addresses the issue with a new approach based on a report titled, *Racial and Ethnic Disparities and Birth Outcomes: A Life-course Perspective* published in the March 2003 issue of the *Maternal and Child Health Journal*, that demonstrated how social and physical stressors, as well as disease, are key predictors of the health outcomes of future babies. According to the Arizona Department of Health Services, the infant-mortality rate among Arizona's African-American population is an alarming 17 to every 1,000 live births—almost three times the national average.

The campaign's goals are simple: address health challenges among the present generation, disrupt current negative lifestyle choices; and as a result improve the health outcomes of generations to come. An educational website (www.liveitchangeit.com) is at the heart of the campaign, supported by print, billboard, and radio advertisements; and brought full circle with a series of community presentations as well as grassroots outreach.

"While improving infant-mortality rates is our primary goal, focusing our message on pregnancy alone would have been too late a touch point to make a difference, plus 50 percent of all pregnancies are unplanned," said Jackie Toliver, RN, MSN, member of the Black Nurses Association. "Our approach focuses on the health of women and men before they are pregnant, or believe that they will become pregnant; as well as the state of health between new babies—a dynamic referred to as preconception health and inter-conception care."

The approach was tailored for the audience by the campaign's marketing partner, RIESTER.

"Two key elements drove the development: the defined predictors of healthy babies and an admirable community pride observed during our focus groups," said Mirja Riester, executive director of context planning at RIESTER. "The campaign forces the audience to reflect upon a question: What will you pass down? We believe it has the potential to seed long-term change."

All of the campaign materials can be previewed at www.liveitchangeit.com.

Live It Change It will be guided on the ground by the Black Nurses Association of Greater Phoenix and Tanner Community Development Corporation—individuals and organizations that are familiar with prevalent health challenges that must be addressed in order to make a positive impact on baby outcomes, including, diabetes, heart disease, obesity and hypertension, as well as issues of teen pregnancy and drug abuse.

Collectively they will take the *Live It Change It* message into living rooms and boardrooms across the state via community presentations including sharing an inspirational 3-minute video available for viewing now at www.liveitchangeit.com that speaks to the audience in a very poignant and empowering fashion. Other non-traditional outreach includes materials distribution at barber shops, beauty parlors and nail salons. The campaign is scheduled to run through 2010.

About LiveltChangelt.com. *Live It Change It* seeks to improve infant-mortality rates among African Americans in Arizona. It is an original public awareness campaign tailored to challenges unique to

African Americans living in the state including the highest rate of poor birth outcomes in the state; twice as many teen pregnancies, low birth weight and very low birth weight babies when compared to the White population; and a trend of unplanned pregnancies among young unmarried mothers, ages 15-24, who accounted for 40 percent of new births within the African American population in 2007.

The effort is being guided on the ground by a handful of community-based organizations familiar with the health issues that are key predictors of healthy baby outcomes. To date the campaign partners include: the Arizona Black Nurses Association, Tanner Community Development Corporation; and the Arizona Department of Health Services, Bureau of Women's and Children's Health. The campaign website is LiveItChangeIt.com.

###