

# Office of the Governor

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### **Governor Speaks at Minority Health Summit; Stresses Need to Eliminate Disparities in Minority Health Care**

Gov. Christie Whitman today attended "The Health of Minorities in New Jersey, Round One: The Black Experience" summit, stressing the need to end disparities affecting the health care of New Jersey's minority community.

"Our New Jersey family cannot reach its potential as long as the health disparity between blacks and whites remains a serious and troubling problem," said the Governor. "Of course, as you are well aware, this disparity is not only a New Jersey problem. It is national in scope. We should keep that in mind as we look for answers."

"We should understand that we cannot erase such a longstanding disparity simply by an act of government," she continued. "Doctors and nurses have to be part of the solution. So do hospitals and schools. So do teachers and ministers. So do employers and community organizations. And, of course, so do families themselves, as well as government."

This is the second day of the summit, one of two to be held on the issue of minority health care. A summit on Latino health issues is scheduled for spring 2000. The summit was attended by decision-makers in government, the health care industry, academia, community leaders, national experts and NJ minority health experts. Activities for participants include panel discussions, small group discussions and a networking lunch. The summit is intended to develop an innovative action plan to address minority health issues.

"I look forward to the ideas that come from this summit, as well as next spring's summit on Latino health issues," said Gov. Whitman. "These recommendations will go to the Commissioner of Health and ultimately to me, helping us clarify the next steps we need to take - not only as an administration but also as New Jersey citizens and communities. The challenge is mighty. The work will be hard. But I am confident we can make a difference."

"Even before the idea for this summit emerged the department was working to improve the health of minority populations by expanding cancer detection screenings, increasing minority access to cardiac services and raising public awareness about the problem of black infant mortality," said Department of Health and Senior Services Commissioner Christine Grant. "But eliminating health disparities is an issue too big for government. It requires a thoughtful action plan involving everyone in the community."

Formed in 1996, the Black Infant Mortality Blue Ribbon panel has been working with the state to reduce the high rate of infant mortality in the African-American community. A \$1 million public awareness campaign, "Black Infants/Better Survival (BIBS)", is currently underway and features paid advertisements and community outreach programs designed to reach African-American women of childbearing age and their families in order to inform them of the steps they can take to reduce risks.

Also created in 1996, the NJ Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Initiative, offers education, screening, and follow-up testing services in all 21 counties. Since its creation, the program has provided nearly 15,000 eligible women with free mammograms and 12,000 with cervical cancer screenings. In her FY 2000 budget, Gov. Whitman provided \$900,000 for a statewide prostate cancer outreach, screening, and education program. The program will serve uninsured men over age 50 and will specifically target African-American men over the age of 40.

Programs and hospitals throughout the state are improving their outreach into the minority community. In addition, Gov. Whitman recently expanded KidCare, by raising the income limit to reach more children and by eliminating the waiting period.

