



Regional Conversation Overview  
Atlanta, GA  
February 6 - 8, 2008

*Conversation (kon var'sa shan) n. A spoken exchange of opinions, thoughts, and feelings.*

Regional Conversations, hosted by the Office of Minority Health (OMH), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, are designed to address one of the most pressing issues today – *the disparity in health care for minority populations*. Your participation is essential to this conversation. Sharing your opinions, thoughts and views on this topic with other local, state, tribal, regional and federal level experts and practitioners from both the private and public sectors, will lay the foundation for a comprehensive, community-driven, sustained approach across the nation.

Experts like you have consistently demonstrated a strong commitment to understanding and eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities. The ***Regional Conversation*** in Atlanta, Georgia on February 6, 7 and 8, 2008 is an opportunity for you to address this issue in a positive and proactive way with others who share your experience and passion. The meeting is a more focused, localized continuation of the National Leadership Summit on Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Disparities.

---

## **Background**

Over the last decade, the U.S. population grew by 13 percent and increased in diversity at an even greater rate. Racial and ethnic minorities are among the fastest growing communities in the country and today comprise 34 percent of the U.S. population. By the year 2030, racial and ethnic minorities are projected to represent 40 percent of the U.S. population. The Bureau of Labor Statistics predicts that 41.5% of the U.S workforce will be members of racial and ethnic minority groups within the next decade. In the midst of this increasing diversity, improvements in the overall health status of American are linked to improvements in the health status and health outcomes of minority populations.

The existence of health disparities among minority populations is undisputed: the question that confronts us is: “***What actions can be taken by private and public partners that would improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our collective efforts?***”

---



## **The National Partnership for Action (NPA) Mission**

The mission of the NPA is to increase the effectiveness of programs that target the elimination of health disparities through the coordination of partners, leaders, and stakeholders committed to action. The National Partnership for Action to End Health Disparities is intended to serve as a catalyst for leadership action around five core objectives:

- Increased awareness of health disparities;
- Strengthened leadership at all levels;
- Improved patient-provider communication;
- Improved cultural and linguistic competency;
- Improved coordination and utilization of research and evaluation outcomes.

Together, experts, practitioners, leaders, stakeholders, and partners from both private and public sectors can continue to construct strategies and actions, and shape policies, that are in support of these objectives. These regionally-based meetings are taking place over the next 12 to 14 months and are designed to:

- Identify and acknowledge the social, economic, cultural and behavioral underlying factors and contributors that cause health disparities;
- Examine the intersection of health disparities, health care access, health care programs and services as causes;
- Identify the programs that successfully serve the needs of minority populations within communities;
- Critically examine the role of policy, and both intended and unintended consequences on minority populations;
- Determine “best ways” to address critical health gaps among populations and specific diseases;
- Identify solutions, methods and programs that will address these gaps, improve the effectiveness of existing programs, and more efficiently apply resources.

---

## **Driving Forces**

*Conversations · Commitment to action · Collaboration · Partnerships that leverage resources*

### **Healthy People 2010**

Over the past several years, eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities has become a high profile issue at the national, state, tribal, and local level. Eliminating racial and ethnic health disparities garnered further attention when it was included as an overarching goal in the nation’s health objectives, Healthy People 2010.



According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), health disparities are the differences in incidence, prevalence, mortality, and burden of diseases and other adverse health conditions that exist among specific population groups in the U.S. (NIH 2000) Substantial research demonstrates the existence and persistence of racial and ethnic health disparities. Less is known about the causes of such disparities. Research suggests that socioeconomic status, racial and ethnic differences in access to health care and other resources, the effects of racism and segregation, and living and occupational conditions are likely sources of disparities within geographic areas (CDC 2002).

### **The Need for Collaboration**

We know that dollars, resources and programs that successfully address health disparities among minority populations currently exist. We believe, as a fundamental principle, that their effectiveness can be increased through a *collaboration* of partners, experts, policy-makers if managed beyond state boundaries.

The Regional Conversations provide, for the first time, a unique forum for broad-based, open discussions of findings and solutions that can then be implemented. Our goals for these meetings are:

- Build a renewed sense of teamwork across communities;
- Share success stories and methods for getting improved results;
- Demonstrate how model programs can be replicated or tailored for greater impact;
- Create methods, tactics, and ideas that support more effective and efficient action;
- Improving existing programs, identifying future priority activities, as well as establishing or strengthening inter- and intra-state partnerships;
- Share best practices;
- Enhance communication channels.

This conversation *must be ongoing* and it is important that we continue to share insights with each other, provide feedback, and assist in defining a comprehensive **Regional Blueprint** of steps that can be taken immediately and in the near future.

---

## **Participating in the Regional Conversations**

A true conversation cannot take place without the participation of key contributors. You have been invited to this **Regional Conversation** because you have been recognized as a leader, contributor, and/or stakeholder committed to making decisions and taking action.

We have invited participants from the local, county, state, tribal, regional and national levels.



Names were identified from state representatives in public health; community representatives such as local, county and tribal health officials, faith-based organizations, local media, grantees, CBO's, educators; healthcare and healthcare system organizations and associations; educators and researchers from both academic and public institutions; and business and foundation leaders from the private sector.

Prior to the start of the Regional Conversation, the Office of Minority Health will host a Community Roundtable involving local, tribal and academic leaders to identify community-level priorities and community-inspired solutions. The results of the preliminary meeting will be shared with all participants in the initial plenary session.

Attendees will be divided into facilitated breakout sessions to participate in a series of related discussions devoted to identifying future priority activities and establishing or strengthening inter- and intra-state partnerships. Integral to the design and implementation of more effective actions and broader-based strategies, it is our hope that active participation in the planned plenary and breakout sessions will mobilize new partnerships within the region. Additional conference calls and in-person meetings during the following 60 days are expected as each breakout group continues to develop action steps and strategies for addressing the top regional healthcare issues more completely, with the assistance of their facilitators.

The culmination of these post-meeting "conversations" will result in a Regional Blueprint that captures specific findings, strategies and methods for immediate and future actions.

---

## **Preparing for the Meeting**

No one knows better than you the questions that need to be asked regarding disparities in minority health care and outcomes. We encourage you to prepare for the meeting by reviewing information we have provided. Prior to the meeting, please consider your thoughts and responses to the following:

- What defines successful programs and actions that are addressing health disparities among minority populations;
- How do you measure the results and outcomes of these programs;
- What programs and practices have you found to be most effective in significantly improving health disparities;
- What are the barriers that decrease the effectiveness of programs in your community;
- What are the solutions, policies, programs, resources and systems that are needed to dramatically improve outcomes in addressing health problems among minority populations;
- What are the infrastructure components that need to be created or further developed to ensure that promising programs and actions are recognized and supported?



## **Next Steps – The Conversation continues....**

The culmination of this meeting is the development, dissemination and implementation of strategic objectives and tactical recommendations known as the Regional Blueprint. It is our intent to communicate these results - the Regional Blueprint – and to also provide a structure for continued and ongoing discussions through the following:

- Action-oriented and sustainable teams composed of experts, advocacy groups, community program leaders, coalition groups and the media that will work collaboratively to ensure timely, accurate and effective communications about specific regional healthcare issues by reducing cultural and linguistic barriers;
- Stronger regional collaborations among researchers, policy-makers, communities and service delivery systems to more effectively examine and shape policies;
- More proactive support of local and regional workshops, programs, health and significant cultural events, and evaluation/communication outreach activities that address the needs of minority populations as it relates to health disparities.

This conversation ***must be ongoing*** and it is important that we continue to share insights with each other, provide feedback, and assist in defining a comprehensive ***Regional Blueprint*** for eliminating health disparities.

We realize there are costs and risks associated with developing an aggressive blueprint for action, but we believe that ***inaction is no longer an option*** and, in the long run, it is far more risky to allow disparities to continue to grow.

***We look forward to our conversation with you!***