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HIV VACCINE AWARENESS DAY

A Message from Paul A. Kawata, Executive Director of the National Minority AIDS Council, Washington, DC about the Importance of HIV Vaccine Awareness Day (HVAD) on Sunday, May 18, 2008

Join thousands of others across the United States this Sunday, May 18 in honoring **HIV Vaccine Awareness Day** (HVAD). This annual observance day recognizes and thanks volunteers, health professionals, scientists and community members, who are working together to find a safe and effective HIV vaccine.

As Executive Director of the **National Minority AIDS Council**, I have worked on the frontlines of the AIDS epidemic for nearly two decades. We are always seeking new HIV/AIDS prevention tools. An HIV vaccine is the best long-term hope to controlling and one day ending the AIDS epidemic worldwide.

And, as you probably remember from childhood, vaccinations against viruses like the ones that cause polio and measles are powerful weapons against disease, especially viruses like HIV. No major viral epidemic has been defeated without a vaccine.

In the United States, the very survival of communities of color, which have been hardest hit by AIDS since the epidemic began, may depend upon the discovery of a vaccine. That said, you may be wondering why we don't have one already.

The answer is simple: vaccines often taken many years to develop, and must be tested in multiple trials with a diverse range of people to ensure that they work for the entire population. If we want make this much needed HIV prevention tool a reality faster, we all need to work together to raise awareness around, and participate in, vaccine research.

Supporting vaccine research is easy. Get educated and pass the word along to others! The **Be the Generation website**, operated by the **National Institutes of Allergy and Infectious Diseases** (NIAID), which spearheads much of the AIDS vaccine research worldwide, is a great place to start.

You also should visit **NMAC's HIV vaccine awareness website**, which features an online vaccine tutorial, calendar, and resource library. This year, NMAC is holding an **HIV Vaccine Awareness Poster Contest**, which invites entries from amateur artists, aged 15 and older, in any artistic medium whether created with paint and a brush or Adobe Illustrator and a PC. **Entries need to encourage viewers to join the fight against AIDS and learn more about HIV vaccines, and are due on June 30, 2008.**

The top three posters will be featured on our website and at our annual **United States Conference on AIDS**, the largest AIDS meeting held annually in this country, **September 18-21, in Miami Beach, FL**. The winner will be decided prior to the conference through a national poll and made into a postcard for distribution to our constituents nationwide! The winner also will receive a free roundtrip domestic airline ticket good for travel to anywhere in the continental United States. For more information, visit **NMAC's website**, or contact our Communications Division at **(202) 234-5120** or **communications@nmac.org**.

If you're not an artist, you can still help with the vaccine effort on HVAD by supporting local awareness events in your area. You can find out where they are taking place by visiting either **Be the Generation** or **NMAC's HVAD Calendar of Events**.

And of course, I also encourage you to become a vaccine trial volunteer yourself and to encourage those around you to do so as well. Sadly, it has been difficult to recruit a diverse pool of HIV vaccine trials volunteers. Many people mistakenly believe that HIV vaccine research is not safe, or can infect you with the virus. **But trust me: HIV vaccines do not contain the HIV virus and cannot cause HIV infection.** The safety of vaccine trial volunteers is the number one priority of researchers conducting these studies. For more information, **visit us online today**.