Personal health awareness and advocacy are essential to the overall health of individuals. Each quarter, the Arkansas Minority Health Commission (AMHC) hosts public forums and health fairs in different cities around the state to promote health awareness and to assess the needs of the community.

On July 21st – July 23rd the AMHC hosted a three-day health awareness tour in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. The tour featured a public forum, gospel concert and health fair for the residents in and around the city of Pine Bluff.

PUBLIC FORUM “BUILDING HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES”

The AMHC Public Forum was held Thursday, July 21 at the Pine Bluff Convention Center. Residents heard the startling health statistics of Jefferson County which included high rates of premature deaths, low birth weights, children living in poverty, adult obesity, STDs and homicides. When ranking the healthiest counties in Arkansas, out of 75, Jefferson County ranks 50th.

“I was shocked to see some of these statistics,” said Pine Bluff resident and Commission Chair, Vivian Flowers. “Even with our industrial park, the wellness center and hospitals we still have a lot of work to do in Jefferson County.”

More than 60 residents shared their concerns that included issuing condoms in schools, achieving access to quality fitness centers and access to healthier and affordable foods.

A concern that has been a hot topic recently has been the issue of mental health in the African American community. Kymara Seals of Senator Mark Pryor’s office and a Pine Bluff resident wanted to know why there is a mental health stigma in the African American community.

AMHC Commissioner Christine Patterson (Redfield) stated that part of the problem is the culture. “We are programmed that any problems with mental health issues stay within the family,” said Patterson. “There
is also an issue of trust,” she said. AMHC Commissioner Dr. Carolyn Mosley (Fort Smith) revealed that individuals cannot go to the hospital for mental health issues like any other illness. "Until the recent health care reform bill, mental health was not even addressed like any other chronic illness," said Mosley. Also, until recently, job applicants were asked to reveal their mental health history. “People were not seeking treatment because they don’t want to list mental issues on a job application,” she said.

In response, Representative Henry “Hank” Wilkins of District 17 used the parents and supporters of Autism care to encourage the audience to advocate for their cause. “When those parents started coming to the capitol, calling legislators at home and putting their plan together, they got an answer,” said Wilkins.

AMHC learned that Pine Bluff residents are concerned about their health and the health of their community, this was evident by their passionate dialogue. Patricia O’Neal shared how the women in her community get together to support each other and to discuss how to eat healthier and their healthcare needs. I’m considered a little old lady now… I’m 57,” said O’Neal. “Women are dying early in my neighborhood,” she said. “They are dying with a lot of life left.”

Those audience members who were interested in starting a similar group in their area were encouraged to seek out mini-grants and reach out to their local hometown health coalition or county health unit.

Flowers closed the forum stating, “More important than what the commission can do or what legislators can do...are people empowering themselves with information and taking action to improve their quality of life.”
Health Awareness Gospel Concert

An audience of approximately 400 from Pine Bluff, Little Rock, Wabbaseka, Jacksonville and surrounding areas filled Greater Fellowship Ministries for AMHC’s Health Awareness Gospel Concert on Friday, July 22. The concert starred national gospel recording artist, Evelyn Turrentine-Agee and The Warriors and featured Pine Bluff native, Michelle Johnson, Torry Dulaney and R.A.W. and Cedric Hayes and the Gloryland Pastor’s Choir. During the show, the audience received invaluable health awareness information on Sickle Cell, Fitness and Nutrition and HIV/AIDS Prevention. Presenters were Phyllis Hodges, Owner of Carousel Fit 4 Life Wellness Center, Chinetta Davis of the Jefferson Comprehensive Care System, Inc. in Pine Bluff, and Cathy Hunt of Pine Bluff Mutual Sickle Cell Support Group.

Evangelist Turrentine-Agee not only provided entertainment but gave a personal testimony of personal health awareness and stressed the importance of early screening and detection.

“Having Evangelist Turrentine-Agee share her experience is a testament of how everyone should take advantage of preventive care services,” said AMHC Executive Director, Dr. Idonia Trotter. “These preventive measures save lives.”

During the gospel celebration, the crowd gets into the spirit of fitness by following along with Jimmy “Get Better” Robinson.
Community Health Fair and Wellness Expo

On the following day approximately 200 residents took advantage of free health screenings and information provided by more than 50 health vendors. Participants were provided with information on breast cancer, diabetes, drug awareness, sickle cell, the WIC program and much more. Demonstrations were given in areas of health and wellness, martial arts, walking, jump rope and hula hoop.

Faith-based and community-based organizations with the highest attendance were given a chance to win free packages to Wild River Country for their youth department or group. Winners of the Wild River Country tickets were Mt. Zion – Altheimer, Old Saint James and New Morning Star!!!
A letter of personal testimony
3-Day Tour, ACS and UAMS Mammovan Representatives Assist Resident with Overcoming Fear

August 10, 2011

Dear Ms. Gordon,

My name is Rita Johnson, and I am writing to you to share my testimony of overcoming fear and shame of having my first mammogram at the age of forty-seven. For years I have listened to people tell me of their pain and fears from their mammogram experiences. Well, the Arkansas Minority Health Commission sponsored a free health fair, on Saturday, July 23rd at the Pine Bluff Convention Center. I met a vendor named Mrs. LaJuy Gordon (which I later discovered was your mother). She was very passionate about The American Cancer Society, particularly the breast cancer awareness. We spoke at great lengths, she even shared a personal tragedy of her losing her best friend to breast cancer because of unawareness and not taking preventive measures. Her compassion for the cause and concern for my health moved me to tears. It was at that moment I had decided that I needed to get a mammogram as soon as possible. Mrs. Gordon had told me that she would follow up with me and was counting on me to get the mammogram. I collected up the pamphlets, business card and went on my way, sharing my encounter with my friends.

Approximately a week later, I had no idea that “my soon as possible” was going to come sooooo soon. I received an early phone call from a friend whom I had shared my health fair encounter with. She alerted me that the Mammogram mobile unit, (UAMS MammoVan) was in our community. I am not going to tell you that I was overjoyed, all I’m going to say is that one should be careful of what they ask God for, (you may just get it). As I went about my daily routine, I knew I had to do what I needed to do… and that was to get the mammogram. After my workout at the wellness center, I drove over to the MammoVan TO JUST INQUIRE… and ended up making a same day appointment for an hour later. I returned to the wellness center to share my news that I had an appointment; they were so happy for me and were very encouraging.

I slipped and took a mild pain reliever about thirty minutes before my breast exam. As time approached, I started praying that anxiety would leave me; I knew I needed to get this exam for my own good. As the screening process begun, I admit I was nervous because of the unknown… but the ladies were friendly and professional, which really eased my nerves. My name was called and I took a few deep breathes and walked into my appointment area very relaxed… The technician was very professional, she explained what was going to be happening and talked me all the way through the exam, I felt relieved. I did not have to retake any pictures and I am happy to report there were no tears or bloodshed. For me emotionally, this was a milestone for me to overcome this fear. This was a very positive experience for me and I hope that every woman who has a fear or anxiety about getting her first mammogram will have a pleasant and professional experience, as I have had. Ultimately, this experience has exceeded my expectations and has encouraged me to share my experience with others.

I would like to give a special thank you to Mrs. Gordon (your mother) for sharing her experience with me and compassion upon me.

And to Dr. Idonia Trotter for having the Gospel Concert, which took place on Friday, July 22 at Greater Fellowship Church, in Pine Bluff Arkansas… this event, prepared me spiritually as well as educated me for the upcoming health fair on the 23rd.

And finally an extra special thank you to Legoria Payton, the event planner and my friend… who helps me to see beyond myself by helping others, … by volunteering at the health fair events… it led me to meeting Mrs. Gordon and Dr. Trotter who encouraged and educated me naturally and spiritually regarding my health. I will be getting a mammogram annually.

Sincerely submitted,

Rita Johnson
Gould, Arkansas
Life after Camp iRock: Change for the girl means change for the family

“I want to learn how to eat and feel better about myself but I don’t have the mind set or discipline yet.” This was a line from sixth grader Amber Artis’ letter to AMHC as part of her admission to Camp iRock.

Amber was one of 40 girls from around the state that embarked on a seven-day path to a healthier lifestyle. The girls experienced a series of activities, workshops and exercises aimed at promoting physical activity, healthy lifestyles and building self-confidence.

Before Camp iRock, Amber acknowledges that she ate whatever she wanted, whenever she wanted. Because of the family’s busy schedule, she developed bad eating habits. “I must admit we let food pacify and entertain her,” said Amber’s mom Yolanda Artis.

Mrs. Artis felt a sense of guilt because she was going to school and working and did not have time to ensure that Amber was eating properly and being physically active. With middle school coming up she knew that Amber would be in a different environment and wanted her to develop more confidence and coping skills. “I felt I owed it to her to allow her to go to Camp iRock,” she said.

It’s been close to two months since the closing day of Camp iRock and Amber continues to incorporate the tools she learned. “I called her the food Nazi…I wasn’t happy with you guys,” said Mrs. Artis laughing. “She made us measure everything.”

Last summer, for her lunch, her mom would pack a Lunchable, a bag of chips, and a peanut butter sandwich. This summer, her mother packs only two fruits and a Lunchable in her lunch. “I honestly believed she would get hungry if I didn’t pack enough food,” said Mrs. Artis.

The family is now more active. They have tried Zumba classes; they go walking on the Big Dam Bridge, and walking on a local track at least twice a week. “She was very vocal about the way we were eating and our activity level,” said Mrs. Artis.

“One day my mom tried to fuss at me for walking too slow,” said Amber. “I told her, I’m out here for you because you’re not doing anything.” However, she admits she said it a long way off from her mom.

“I would encourage parents to let their girls go to Camp iRock,” said Mrs Artis. “Sometimes as a girl overweight, you feel as if you are the only one, at Camp iRock—all of the girls are the same.

Check out pictures from Camp iRock at facebook.com/arminorityhealth
Arkansas Minority Health Consortium member, the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Arkansas (CTFA) and its partners joined legislators and public health advocates on July 27 to celebrate the institution of Acts 8 and 13, as well as commemorate Act 811 of 2011, the new law that expands the current smoke-free cars law.

Act 8 of 2006, commonly referenced as the Arkansas Clean Indoor Air Act, prohibits smoking in certain indoor areas to protect workers from the dangers of exposure to secondhand smoke on the job. It is this act that also comes with exemptions that CTFA would like to see lawmakers make more stringent. Act 13 of 2006, known as the "Arkansas Protection for Secondhand Smoke for Children Act" prohibits smoking in all motor vehicles where a child is less than 6 years old and weighs less than sixty pounds. Effective July 27th, Act 13 will be expanded by a new smoke-free cars law, Act 811 of 2011.

Signed into law March 30, 2011 by Governor Mike Beebe, Act 811 of 2011 increased the age limit from 6 years of age up to 14 years whereby approximately 75% of Arkansas’s children will be covered by the smoke free cars law, up from the 37% of youth covered by Act 13. Additionally, Act 811 allows Arkansas law enforcement to help protect young children by stopping drivers seen smoking in a car with a child present. A ticket, which currently carries a $25 fine, could be issued to offenders of the law.

Speakers were Katherine Donald, Executive Director, Coalition for a Tobacco Free Arkansas; Senator Percy Malone, District 64; Representative Fred Allen, District 33; Representative Kathy Webb, District 37; Bob Mathis, Former State Representative and Ruby Trotter, child advocate for smoke free cars.

"If you are a smoker, the single best way to protect your children and other family members from secondhand smoke is to quit smoking," said Katherine Donald. "In the meantime, you can protect your children and others by making your home and vehicles smoke-free and only smoking outside."
AMHC Staff Development and Conferences

Executive Director, Dr. Idonia Trotter attended the 2011 National HIV Prevention Conference August 14-17 in Atlanta. More than 3000 participants representing health agencies, community and faith-based organizations from around the U.S. attended the conference. The theme of the conference was "The Urgency of Now: Reduce incidence. Improve access. Promote equity." This theme was chosen to reinforce and reflect the urgent need to quickly and efficiently scale-up proven interventions and improve the coordination of our nation’s response at the national, state, and local levels in order to achieve the maximum impact on HIV incidence, the health of people living with HIV, and HIV-related health disparities. The National HIV Prevention Conference provided an important opportunity to look back at the successes and challenges of the first 30 years of the epidemic, the lessons learned, and how we can apply these lessons today to have an even greater impact on the HIV epidemic.

Director of Communications, Cozetta Jones attended the 2011 National Conference on Health Communication, Marketing, and Media sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. More than 1,100 participants from throughout the U.S. and 25 countries representing many diverse disciplines and sectors attended the conference. The theme for this year’s conference was "Listening for Change." Sessions included "The Culture of Contentment: The New Context of Consumption and Communications, Designing Evidence-Based Communication Strategies to Effect Policy Change and Innovations in Listening, Understanding and Inspiring for Change.

Sue Espinoza of the Arkansas Human Development Corporation and Daniel Vasquez of Jefferson Comprehensive Care System, Inc., Co-Chairs of NLAAD, demonstrate how simple and quick it is to take an Rapid HIV Test. The Latino group hope to inspire more Latinos to “Know Your Status” and take the test during the NLAAD event.
Navigating through the many doors and doctors in the health care system to access individual care can be a daunting task for many Arkansans. However, what happens when you have to navigate the health care system as you assist elderly parents or a loved one with a dismal medical diagnosis?

When Holley Little’s mother was diagnosed with stage 4 cancer in July of 2009, Holley nor her mother, ever expected to deal with the battery of doctors and medical professionals to ensure proper healthcare was provided. Moving from facility to facility and seeing doctor after doctor, Holley’s mom endured a series of repetitive tests from doctors and specialists while being fit for a feeding tube, and having blood work and dental procedures done. The result of all this treatment and tests was multiple paper medical records at various locations without any cohesion or organization as to who saw her last and what treatment options were provided.

Noting the importance of electronic medical records, Holley said, “You don’t know what you don’t know” when discussing her mother’s treatments with several doctors. The frustration of mounting paper work with each doctor’s visit was also cause for concern making visits nightmarish and difficult to deal with.

The value of a Health Information Exchange would be beneficial to patients like Holley’s mom who recently had an experience that was life threatening. While receiving treatment after surgery, Holley’s mom was almost administered morphine for pain, a drug to which she has a severe allergy. Luckily, Holley was able to intervene as a patient advocate for her mother and noted the allergy to the attending nurse who apparently had an incomplete medical chart with no reference to this medication allergy.

As a result of what Holley has had to contend with in helping manage her mother’s medical care, she has taken a more active role in managing her family’s health records. With the use of online tools like Microsoft HealthVault and MedicAlert, she is compiling her medical treatments, allergies and doctors in order to assist her family in the event they need to help her during a major medical event.

The use of Health Information Technology and the value of the Health Information Exchange can potentially limit the incidences of miscommunication and frustration for the patient and the physician. More importantly, it can also reduce the chances of catastrophic medical errors that Holley’s mom and perhaps other Arkansans have encountered. The implementation of the Health Information Exchange in Arkansas, to be known as SHARE, the State Health Alliance for Records Exchange, will serve to reduce potential medical errors and improve patient safety.

The use and value of the SHARE can provide peace of mind when unexpected medical challenges arise and are beyond our control.

For more information visit http://ohit.arkansas.gov
AMHC partners with HBCU to improve health literacy and alleviate Black on Black Crime

AMHC has teamed up with Arkansas Baptist College to highlight "Health Literacy" and "Black on Black Crime" as important issues impacting minority health. AMHC Commissioner Willie McGhee will be a guest speaker on a distinguished panel of Arkansans addressing Black on Black Crime on a daily basis in their communities. The Black on Black Crime "Action" Summit is set for September 1st at 7pm at the Arkansas Baptist College Auditorium. In addition, AMHC will be at the Tailgate Party leading up to the Game between UAPB and Langston University. AMHC and its partners will provide health screenings and information to Classic-goers.