

NEWS RELEASE



For Immediate Release

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UNISON HEALTH PLAN OF THE CAPITAL AREA LAUNCHES INITIATIVE TO ADDRESS HEART DISEASE DISPARITY AMONG MINORITIES IN D.C.

- *Heart Smart Sisters initiative will focus on heart disease education and outreach to African-American and Latino women in high-risk Washington, D.C. neighborhoods who suffer from heart related chronic health conditions at alarmingly high numbers.*
- *Year-long program is a collaboration led by Unison Health Plan with support from YWCA of the National Capital Area, Greater Washington Urban League, Latino Federation of Greater Washington, and Novo Nordisk Pharmaceuticals*

WASHINGTON, DC (March 5, 2010) – Unison Health Plan of the Capital Area, a unit of AmeriChoice, a UnitedHealth Group (NYSE: UNH) company, announces the launch of a year-long, community-wide initiative to address the prevalence of heart disease and health disparities among African-American and Latino women in the District of Columbia. The *Heart Smart Sisters* initiative will educate women about the risk factors for developing heart disease and empower them to make the necessary lifestyle changes to improve their individual health status and reduce the overall incidence of heart disease in their community.

Led by Unison Health Plan of the Capital Area, the *Heart Smart Sisters* initiative is supported by several strategic partners including Novo Nordisk Pharmaceuticals, the YWCA of the National Capital Area, Greater Washington Urban League, Latino Federation of Greater Washington, and community-based health providers throughout the District.

“Research indicates that there is an alarmingly high rate of heart disease, obesity, diabetes and generally poor health among African-American women in the District,” said Charlisa Watson, Executive Director of Unison Health Plan of the Capital Area, which provides diversified health services aimed at helping localities and other government agencies facilitate care for the economically impoverished, the medically underserved and those without the benefit of employer-funded health care coverage. “Considering how heart disease disproportionately affects women of color, we created the *Heart Smart Sisters* initiative to evoke change and raise awareness in areas of our community that are most vulnerable to this health epidemic.”

The initiative will include a year-long program of targeted outreach to community groups, civic and faith-based organizations in priority Wards in the District through a series of educational events, community Town Hall meetings and health screenings. A citywide launch event will also be held this spring with District health officials, city council members, Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC) leadership and other key collaborators.

Creation of *Heart Smart Sisters* stemmed from a 2009 report released by the Kaiser Family Foundation that found local women of color suffer from heart disease at extremely high rates. As the leading cause of death for women in America, heart disease kills nearly half a million women each year, which is more than breast cancer, (MORE)

stroke and lung cancer, combined. Another report from the District of Columbia Department of Health found the top two causes of preventable death in the District to be tobacco and physical inactivity, both risk factors that contribute significantly to heart disease.

Although heart disease affects all women, African-American and Latino women in particular have some of the highest rates of the major risk factors for heart disease, including obesity, physical inactivity, high blood pressure, tobacco use and diabetes. According to the 20th Anniversary Edition of *America's Health Rankings*[™], released by United Health Foundation, the American Public Health Association and Partnership for Prevention, nearly 8 percent of adults in the District suffer from diabetes. Even more alarming is that 64 percent of women who die suddenly of coronary heart disease have no previous symptoms.

About Unison Health Plan of the Capital Area

Unison Health Plan of the Capital Area, Inc. serves 29,000 Medicaid and Alliance beneficiaries in the District of Columbia. The health plan is a unit of AmeriChoice, the public sector health care business of UnitedHealth Group (NYSE: UNH). UnitedHealth Group is a diversified Fortune 50 health and well-being company. AmeriChoice serves 3 million members in 25 states and the District of Columbia. For more information, visit www.americhoice.com.

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