

Office of Minority Health seeks to improve Black lives

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During National Minority Health Month, BET.com talks to J. Nadine Gracia about new programs within the department.

It is an office within the executive branch of the federal government that is little known, but the Office of Minority Health has been playing an active role in raising consciousness about health disparities while helping to educate millions of Americans to live healthier lives.

The office was established in 1986, during the administration of President Ronald Reagan. But the office, which is part of the United States Department of Health and Human Services, has been particularly busy during the presidency of Barack Obama.

The office works with federal and state agencies to develop policies and practices that help advance health among minorities, who have traditionally lagged far behind white Americans in health patterns.

"We also are able to fund projects in communities that are working to address health disparities and improve minority health," said J. Nadine Gracia, the director of the Office of Minority Health, in an interview with BET.com.

"We also help to advance and set policy that will help to improve the health in minority communities," said Gracia, who also served as deputy assistant secretary for the Department of Health and Human Services.

One of the most successful campaigns, she said, has been in curbing the disparity in infant mortality, which has long had far higher rates in the African-American community. Through a program called "A Healthy Baby Begins With You," the office has trained more than 2,000 college students to serve as counselors to go into communities and discuss the importance of health conscious lifestyles for women who are pregnant, she said.

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