

Asthma disproportionately affects minority children, children living below poverty level

WASHINGTON – U.S. federal agencies unveiled the Coordinated Federal Action Plan to Reduce Racial and Ethnic Asthma Disparities. White House Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) Chair Nancy Sutley, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lisa P. Jackson, Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Kathleen Sebelius and Secretary of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Shaun Donovan discussed the new plan during an event at Town Hall Education Arts Recreation Campus (THEARC), which houses The Boys and Girls Club of Greater Washington along with other community groups. Nearly 26 million Americans are affected by this chronic respiratory disease, including 7 million children, especially minority children and children with family incomes below the poverty level. Asthma rates of African American children are currently at 16 percent, while 16.5 percent of Puerto Rican children suffer from the chronic respiratory disease, more than double the rate of Caucasian children in the United States. The annual economic cost of asthma, including direct medical costs from hospital stays and indirect costs such as lost school and work days, amounts to approximately \$56 billion.

“The numbers don’t lie: Asthma disproportionately impacts low-income minority families which is why we must do everything we can to ensure all children have a healthy place to call home,” said HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan. “Today’s announcement will help the federal government support the development of innovative new approaches to improve and control asthma.”

“Across America we see low-income and minority children and families at a disproportionately higher risk for asthma and respiratory illnesses. Air pollution and other challenges are having serious health effects, which compound economic challenges through medical bills and missed school and work days,” said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. “As the mother of a child with asthma, I know what it means for our children to have clean and healthy air to breathe. This Action Plan enables federal agencies and our partners to work more collaboratively and comprehensively on tackling a major health threat, so that we can protect all Americans, no matter what community they call home.”

“Low-income and minority communities often face an unacceptable burden of pollution in this country, diminishing their economic potential and threatening the health of millions of American families,” said Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. “As we close National Asthma Awareness Month today, the President’s Administration is standing behind his commitment to integrating environmental justice into the missions of federal agencies, promoting clean air and healthy communities, and ensuring this really is a country of equal opportunity for all.”

“The report is a blueprint for how we can work together to reduce asthma disparities and help ensure children with asthma get the right care with the right support,” said Secretary Sebelius. “One key factor that is so critical to controlling a child’s asthma is access to health care.

Obama administration working to close racial, ethnic gap on asthma

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Uninsured people with asthma are less likely to take the preventive medicine they may need to keep their condition under control, making them more likely to suffer an attack. That's why we are focused on expanding access to care."

The action plan will coordinate efforts to improve asthma management and prevention:

- **Reduce barriers to asthma care:** Ensure that the populations most severely impacted by asthma receive evidence-based comprehensive care, which includes access to medical services, education and environmental interventions.
- **Build local capacity:** Enhance capacity to deliver integrated, community-based asthma care systems.
- **Target services:** Identify the children, families and communities most impacted by asthma disparities.
- **Accelerate prevention efforts:** Increase understanding of the cause or causes of asthma and test interventions that may prevent the onset of asthma.

More on the action plan: <http://www.epa.gov/asthma/childrenstaskforce>. Also, contact Molly Hooven (EPA) at hooven.molly@epa.gov or 202-564-2313/202-564-4355.