

National Black Church Initiative

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For Immediate Release

National Black Church Initiative and Autism Speaks Partner to Reduce Age of Autism Diagnosis

Collaboration seeks to reduce racial disparities and improve access to care

Washington DC – The National Black Church Initiative (NBCI), a faith-based coalition of 34,000 churches comprised of 15 denominations and 15.7 million African Americans churchgoers, and Autism Speaks, the world’s leading autism science and advocacy organization, today announced their new collaboration seeking to reduce the average age of diagnosis and to increase access to high-quality early intervention for children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in the African American community. The collaboration will be piloted in 150 churches in the greater Atlanta area as part of the Autism Speaks Early Access to Care initiative. Outreach into these congregations will increase awareness of the signs of autism and inform congregants, their extended families, and community of available resources and services.

“Studies clearly demonstrate that signs of autism can emerge as early as 6 to 12 months and that there are effective tools to screen children for autism risk as early as one year and to provide a reliable diagnosis as early as 24 months,” stated Autism Speaks Assistant Director of Public Health Research Amy Daniels, Ph.D. “Yet children in the African American community are typically diagnosed even much later than the four to five years of age which is the average age of autism diagnosis in the United States according to the CDC.”

While early detection is critical to initiate early intervention therapies for optimal outcomes, many parents have very little knowledge about autism and its symptoms. When children with ASD are treated with appropriate early intervention services between the ages of three and five years, approximately 20 to 50 percent of those children may be able to be mainstreamed.

“NBCI is honored to work with Autism Speaks on this critical health issue, which hits close to home for the African American community. Racial disparities in early detection and access to care and diagnostic information are a real concern for the black church, and NBCI pledges to serve as a tireless advocate and community leader to raise awareness on these issues. We look

forward to working with issue experts at Autism Speaks and our Atlanta member churches in the coming weeks and months for the sake of our children's' well-being.”

Through this collaboration, Autism Speaks will provide written and other collateral materials which can be used by these churches to help their congregations understand developmental milestones and the possible signs of autism.

Parents will be provided information regarding standardized screening tools used to assess if a child is at risk for ASD and provide guidance to parents on how to speak with their health care provider. Information provided by Autism Speaks will be given on where and who to contact for further evaluation and early intervention services. Children under age three years are eligible for evaluation provided at no cost through the state's early intervention office. Local Atlanta-based resources include Babies Can't Wait, the Marcus Autism Center (www.marcus.org/), the Emory Autism Center (www.psychiatry.emory.edu/PROGRAMS/autism) and the CDC.

Should a diagnosis of ASD follow, parents can find extensive information on the Autism Speaks website – starting with the [Resource Guide](#) which helps families find links to local services and then through a series of [Tool Kits](#) that offer guidance from the first 100 days after a diagnosis through adulthood.

“We continue to make significant progress in autism research,” added Chief Science Officer Robert H. Ring, Ph.D. "It is critically important to put science into action, to have the research we support work for the community and make a real difference in people's lives. We hope to make a significant difference by substantially lowering the age of diagnosis for so many children at risk."

Following this pilot phase in Atlanta, Autism Speaks and NBCI will assess progress and outcomes before expanding it to other regions across the United States. For more information about the Autism Speaks/NBCI collaboration visit <http://www.naltblackchurch.com/> and for information about the Autism Speaks Early Access to Care initiative, visit: <http://www.autismspeaks.org/early-access-care>.

About NBCI

The National Black Church Initiative is a coalition of 34,000 churches working to eradicate racial disparities in healthcare, technology, education, housing, and the environment. NBCI's mission is to provide critical wellness information to all of its members, congregants, churches and the public. NBCI offers faith-based, out-of-the box and cutting edge solutions to stubborn economic and social issues. NBCI's programs are governed by credible statistical analysis, science based strategies and techniques, and methods that work. Visit our website at www.naltblackchurch.com.