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THE TRUTH ABOUT HEALTH DISPARITIES

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Oakland, February 10, 2004—Secretary Tommy Thompson should be applauded for admitting that he was wrong to edit a report about health care for minorities to downplay serious problems. In fact, people of color consistently face higher rates of morbidity and mortality than whites across a broad spectrum of illnesses and injuries. These higher rates result from both higher incidences of disease and once ill, poorer treatment outcomes.

*The California Campaign to Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Health* was initiated in April 2001 to address this inequity. Formed through a partnership between the American Public Health Association and the California Health and Human Services Agency, the *Campaign* is a statewide coalition of leaders from the public and private arenas of policy, health care, public health, and philanthropy. The *Campaign* released its *Strategic Approach* in November 2003. *Health for All: California's Strategic Approach to Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* not only recognizes that there are disparities but emphasizes, "the conditions and environments that cause minorities to experience illness and disease more often and more severely than the overall population," as described in *The Nation's Health*, the American Public Health Association's monthly newspaper. The emphasis of the plan differs from others in that it not only emphasizes improved medical care for all, but urges taking a step back and looking at the conditions that can be modified to prevent the diseases and injuries in the first place.

The *Approach* delineates a framework for reducing the disparate health outcomes experienced by people of color, which is both a moral and economic imperative. Healthcare is a major public and private expenditure and illness and injury generate tremendous social costs in the form of lost productivity and expenditures for disability, worker's compensation, and public benefit programs. Improving the health status of people of color is a goal that will benefit the entire society since, as the Institute of Medicine declared, "All members of a community are affected by the poor health status of its least healthy members."

*Health for All: California's Strategic Approach to Eliminating Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities* is available at [www.preventioninstitute.org/healthdis.html](http://www.preventioninstitute.org/healthdis.html) and [www.apha.org](http://www.apha.org).

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