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ABC MISSION:

To promote the prevention and treatment of cardiovascular disease including stroke, in Blacks and other minorities and to achieve health equity for all through the elimination of disparities.

May 9, 2022

Ms. Chiquita Brooks-LaSure
Administrator
Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services
7500 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21244

Dear Administrator Brooks-LaSure:

The Association of Black Cardiologists (ABC) applauds the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for identifying health equity as the first pillar of its Strategic Plan, and for setting forth goals to advance health equity, including that CMS programs serve as a catalyst and model to advance health equity through our nation's health care system.

Cardiovascular disease remains the leading cause of death in the United States, and while there have been improvements in life expectancy, trends are heading in the wrong direction with significant disparities persisting among African Americans. The core of ABC's mission is to eliminate disparities in cardiovascular disease for all people of color and that all people, regardless of race, ethnicity or gender should benefit fully from reduction in the frequency, duration and impact of diseases of the heart and blood vessels.

We appreciate that CMS has invited health care industry leaders to share best practices to address systemic inequities in the delivery of care.

As Dr. LaShawn McIver highlighted during the April 26, 2022, CMS national stakeholder call, without data we can't see health disparities and where gaps in care exist. The ABC stands ready to partner with the Agency, including leveraging data being collected through the Cardiovascular Implementation Study (CVIS), a practice-based research registry that is integrating social determinants and technology innovation to address health disparities. CVIS is enrolling diverse patients with prioritized health conditions from collaborating ABC member practices, as well as patients from academic health centers and Federally Qualified Health Centers. CVIS prospectively collects socio-demographic and economic data at the point of care. CVIS will evaluate the safety and clinical outcomes of new therapeutic

agents, including post-marketing surveillance. CVIS data collection tracks quality of care standards established by CMS and commercial health plans. Long term, the goal is for CVIS to become the most comprehensive patient registry for diverse patients with cardiovascular disease and co-morbid conditions by providing real-world data to address health disparities.

The ABC noted with interest the announcement in the Agency’s April 20, 2022, press release that it will convene industry stakeholders, including health care facilities, insurance companies, state officials and providers to advance health equity, beginning with a convening this summer of health care leaders to share best practices and commitments to strengthen maternal health. The ABC is proud to be the cardiovascular society at the forefront in addressing the disparate African American maternal morbidity and mortality crisis and would welcome an opportunity to participate in this forum.

Maternal mortality is overwhelmingly driven by cardiovascular disease. In 2020, ABC convened “A Working Agenda for Black Mothers: Black Maternal Heart Health Roundtable.” The roundtable was just the first step in launching a collaborative task force to tackle pressing issues that influence Black maternal health. The endeavor brought together a diverse group of expert leaders from different areas, including state agencies, faith-based communities, industry, maternal health specialists, other health care specialties, as well as media and partner organizations. An outgrowth of the roundtable was the publication of a paper^{1,2} in *Circulation: Cardiovascular Quality and Outcomes*.

ABC held a second black maternal health roundtable in February 2022 as part of its “We Are The Faces of Black Maternal Health” campaign through which Black cardiologists and medical professionals shared their professional and personal experience with Black Maternal mortality and morbidity – the health of women during preconception, pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum – as well as the impact it has on families.

ABC launched in 2021 a series of virtual table talks addressing black maternal and infant health. Addressing hypertension and prevention of preeclampsia, which lead to poorer maternal and infant health outcomes, including increased mortality, has been an important component of these discussions. The ABC Virtual Table Talk series has been recorded and are available to the public.³

A Labor of Love: Putting Heart into Maternal Health
March 9, 2021

Heart Health: Heart Health from the Postpartum Period and Beyond
April 29, 2021

¹ News Release: A Collaborative Community Approach is Key to Improving Black Maternal Health Crisis, says Position Paper by the ABC. Feb. 17, 2021. <https://abcario.org/recent-news/news-release-a-collaborative-community-approach-is-key-to-improving-black-maternal-health-crisis-says-position-paper-by-the-abc/>

² A Working Agenda for Black Mothers: A Position Paper from the Association of Black Cardiologists on Solutions to Improving Black Maternal Health. R.M.Bond, K.Gaither, S.A.Nasser, M.A.Albert, K.C.Ferdinand, J.N.Njoroge, B.Parapid, S.N.Hayes, C.Pegus, B.Sogade, A.Grodzinsky, K.E.Watson, C.A.McCullough, E. Ofili on behalf of the Association of Black Cardiologists; *Circ Cardiovasc Qual Outcomes* 2021;14:e007643. DOI: 10.1161/CIRCOUTCOMES.120.007643 <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33563007/>

³ <https://abcario.org/abc-webinars/>

A Labor of Love, Part II: Barbershop Talk about Fatherhood, Men's Heart & Mind Health

June 24, 2021

Mission Possible: Preventing Heart Disease Early On

February 10, 2022

Additional virtual table talks are planned for 2022, including one in June that will focus on LGBTQAI+ populations, and another in November for female military veterans.

As you plan to convene stakeholders this summer to discuss ways in which to improve maternal health outcomes experienced by pregnant and postpartum people, we respectfully ask for the opportunity to join the gathering and participate in the discussion. The ABC understands that solving this crisis facing Black mothers takes unwavering purpose, passion, and commitment. The ABC is proud to be a part of that work and would be honored, if invited, to bring the full weight of its member expertise and experience to the CMS discussion table.

For more information or questions, please contact Camille Bonta, ABC policy advisor, at (202) 320-3658 or cbonta@summithealthconsulting.com, and thank you in advance for your consideration of ABC's request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized letter 'A' followed by a long horizontal line that ends in a small flourish.

Anekwe E. Onwuanyi, MD
President
Association of Black Cardiologists

A handwritten signature in black ink, written in a cursive style that reads 'Barbara A. Hutchinson'.

Barbara A. Hutchinson, MD, PhD
Board Chair
Association of Black Cardiologists