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President

November 8, 2011

Honorable Kathleen Sebelius

Secretary

Department of Health and Human Services

200 Independence Avenue, SW

Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

On October 7, 2011, the U. S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) rendered a draft recommendation against the use of the Prostate Specific Antigen (PSA) test for early detection screening of prostate cancer absent "*symptoms that are highly suspicious for prostate cancer.*"

The Conference of National Black Churches (CNBC) is comprised of the national leadership of the nine largest historically Black denominations that have a combined membership of over 21 million people and 50,000 congregations in the United States. Our mission is to serve as a unified voice of Black religious bodies that seeks to improve the quality of life for African Americans and other underserved populations.

We find that the draft recommendations that have been rendered by the USPSTF are enormously disturbing, particularly in view of the fact that African American men have the highest prostate cancer incidence and mortality rates for any racial or ethnic group in the United States. The translation of this recommendation into national policies and medical practices would be a complete reversal of the current emphasis on the early detection of prostate cancer prior to symptoms, before it has a chance to spread, become incurable and potentially fatal.

Under the current medical practices the overall mortality rate for prostate cancer has declined by approximately 40% since the widespread use of the PSA test for early detection. National Cancer Institute models indicate that 45 to 70 percent of the mortality rate decline could be attributed to the impact of the PSA test.

In view of the alarming number of African American men who have been impacted by prostate cancer and recognizing that the incidences of mortality rates represent the largest racial disparity for any type of major cancer, the Conference of National Black Churches must take strong opposition to the recommendations by USPSTF.

African American men are designated as a high risk group for prostate cancer. However, the randomized clinical trial evidence cited by the USPSTF, and used in its decision against the PSA test did not include a statistically significant number of African Americans and possibly not even a significant number of men with a family history of the disease; another high risk group.

Honorable Kathleen Sebelius, Secretary
Department of Health and Human Services

Further, the Conference of National Black Churches strongly urges that the USPSTF, in a public forum, provide the evidence and assumptions that it used to include men "regardless of ...race and family history" within its recommendation. If no compelling and conclusive evidence is available and presented to the public for review and comment, then we believe that men at high risk for prostate cancer cannot be responsibly included in the final subject USPSTF recommendation.

We applaud the USPSTF for raising the concerns about the "harms" inflicted on men that are diagnosed and treated for prostate cancer where there may be no benefit for treatment, and we recognize that African American men and all high risk men could be subject to these harms. However, we strongly believe that the focus should be on accelerating efforts to reduce and eventually eliminate the risk of these harms, while also insuring that the trend of reducing the prostate cancer mortality rate as indicated by the National Cancer Institute data is continued.

This moment of heightened attention to the leading cause of cancer and second leading cause of cancer deaths among men should be used as an opportunity to make progress to eliminate the disease. Finally, the Conference of National Black Churches hopes that this will be the outcome of this critical moment in the fight against prostate cancer and we stand ready with our *50,000 member churches* support efforts towards this goal.

Thank you for consideration of our concerns,

Privileged to continue in the struggle,

Jacqui L. Burton, President
Conference of National Black Churches

W. Franklyn Richardson, Chairman
Conference of National Black Churches