

PushNews from The Big Push for Midwives Campaign

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Midwives Group Applauds American Medical Association's Statement on Racism Calls on AMA to Extend Its Apologies to African American Midwives

WASHINGTON, D.C. (July 10, 2008)—Breaking 40 years of silence, the American Medical Association (AMA) [issued an apology](#)¹ today for its role in ignoring and perpetuating racial disparities in medicine, from discriminatory practices that excluded African American physicians from membership, to the disproportionately poor health outcomes among racial and ethnic minorities.

“Those of us working on maternity care reform have long known that the racial and ethnic disparities in birth outcomes in the U.S. are a [national scandal](#),”² said Susan M. Jenkins, Legal Counsel for the Big Push for Midwives Campaign. “We’ve also known that midwives play a critical role in reducing the two most preventable causes of neonatal death, prematurity and low birth weight. Now that the AMA has recognized the problem, perhaps their members will stop trying to outlaw the solution.”

At its annual meeting in June, the AMA issued resolutions opposing the licensure and regulation of Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs), who specialize in out-of-hospital delivery, with a strong focus on preventative care. Historically, African American midwives have played a significant role in minimizing racial disparities in birth outcomes, and they were employed by the World Health Organization to train traditional birth attendants in developing nations. In the first several decades of the 20th century, the AMA and other medical groups launched a racist campaign to outlaw so-called “[granny midwives](#),”³ which resulted in the closure of the Tuskegee Institute’s state-of-the-art midwifery school and forced African American women into segregated hospitals.

“African American midwives were also a target of racist practices and deserve to be recognized as well; when those midwives were in the community caring for women, we didn’t have such enormous disparity in birth outcomes,” said Jane Peterson, CPM and President of the Wisconsin Guild of Midwives, and Advocacy Trainer with the Big Push for Midwives Campaign. “Immigrant midwives here in Wisconsin and other Midwestern states also struggled against attempts to outlaw them, but they were never subject to the same level of racist animosity.”

LaKeesha Harris, Illinois State Representative for the [International Center for Traditional Childbearing](#)⁴ and a member of the Big Push for Midwives Advisory Committee said she is impatient with the AMA. “Apologies are meaningless without action. One way of ending racial disparities within medicine is by allowing African American women to have complete autonomy over their bodies. They can only do this by having access to health care providers of their choice,” she said. “This includes midwives who have been working for the betterment of our community health for centuries.”

The Big Push for Midwives (<http://www.TheBigPushforMidwives.org>) is a nationally coordinated campaign organized to advocate for regulation and licensure of Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs) in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, and to push back against the attempts of the American Medical Association and the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists to deny American families access to safe and legal midwifery care. The campaign plays a critical role in building a new model of U.S. maternity care delivery at the local and regional levels, at the heart of which is the Midwives Model of Care, based on the fact that pregnancy and birth are normal life processes. Media inquiries: Steff Hedenkamp (816) 506-4630, steff@thepushformidwives.org.

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¹ <http://www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/18773.html>

² <http://www.cdc.gov/omhd/amh/factsheets/infant.htm>

³ <http://www.nbc4.com/news/5679773/detail.html>

⁴ <http://www.blackmidwives.org/>

The Big Push for Midwives Campaign is fiscally sponsored by Sustainable Markets Foundation, a not-for-profit organization recognized as tax-exempt under Internal Revenue Code section 501(c)(3). The mission of the Big Push for Midwives is to build winning, state-level advocacy campaigns towards successful regulation and licensure of Certified Professional Midwives (CPMs) in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.

Learn more about the Big Push for Midwives Campaign on the Web at www.TheBigPushforMidwives.org.

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