

*NATIONAL BLACK MEN'S HEALTH NETWORK, INC.*

250 Georgia Avenue • Suite 321 • Atlanta, Georgia 30312 • (404) 524-7237

February 7, 2002

Supervisor Yvonne Burke  
500 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Supervisor Burke,

I am writing in support of the proposed Commission for Men in Los Angeles County.

By training, I am public health physician with a deep concern about the status of men's health in the United States. I am on the advisory board of the Washington D.C.-based Men's Health Network and president of the National Black Men's Health Network. The Commonwealth Study (2000) demonstrated that men as a gender are considerably less likely to have seen a physician in the past year and less likely to carry health insurance. The situation is worst for African-America and Latino men, groups whose status regarding the health care system is linked to their status as a gender.

Men have health care issues specific to their gender. Boys are generally taught to deal with pain and injury stoically and to rely principally on themselves. While these traits may enhance performance on a football field or on a battlefield, they make for a very poor interface with the health care field. Public information about men's health issues is so deficient that many people say "prostrate" cancer when they mean "prostate" cancer. There are few issues in the health care system for men and boys to identify with, so their participation in the maintenance of their own wellness is frequently lacking.

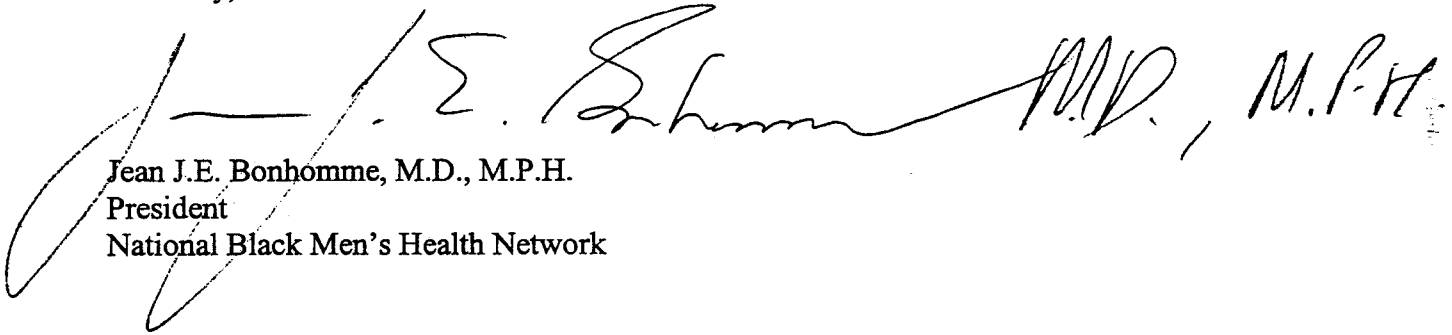
In 1920, there was only one year's difference in life expectancy between the sexes. Now the average difference is about six years. Why did the increase in life expectancy that took place for men in the 20th century fail to keep pace with women's increase?

I became involved with the men's health issue because men of minority groups fare worst of all, with average life expectancies barely long enough to collect Social Security or Medicare. The third world life expectancies for minority males in the United States have been ignored far too long.

Fortunately, the tide of indifference towards men's health and longevity appears to be turning on a national scale. The State of Georgia has established the nation's first Men's Health Commission. Legislation has been proposed in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington D.C. for an Office of Men's Health under the Department of Health and Human Services. California has often led the nation, setting trends for the future, and before you is the opportunity to do so again.

Consider the physical, financial, and mental health impact of the AIDS epidemic alone. Once called GRID (Gay Related Immune Disease) and considered to be exclusively a gay man's disease, it is exacting a devastating toll on women of color nationwide and constitutes an enormous burden on the health care system. The issue of men's health is not solely a men's issue, but an issue which affects the physical, mental and economic health of society as a whole. Please become a part of building a better future for us all.

Sincerely,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jean J.E. Bonhomme M.D., M.P.H." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "J" and "B".

Jean J.E. Bonhomme, M.D., M.P.H.  
President  
National Black Men's Health Network