



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND SENIOR SERVICES

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Commissioner

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New Jersey is rich in ethnic, racial and cultural diversity. With a population of more than eight million, almost 64 percent are white, more than 13 percent are black, just over 15 percent are Hispanic, nearly seven and a half percent are Asian or Pacific Islander and .02 percent are American Indian or Alaskan native. With this racial and cultural diversity comes many languages. Twenty-six percent of New Jersey's population—or more than two million residents—speak a language other than English at home and 11 percent of the population has limited English proficiency.

This wealth of cultural diversity presents us with great health care challenges not only because of language barriers, but also because of the vast and increasing differences in the incidence, prevalence and death rates of diseases among different populations in this state.

In New Jersey, like the rest of the nation, these health disparities are pervasive and long-standing. Some of the biggest disparities exist in the areas of asthma, cervical and prostate cancer, cardiovascular disease, obesity, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and infant mortality. These and other health disparities result from a complex set of factors including education, environment, language barriers, lack of health insurance, income and other socioeconomic factors.

Reducing and ultimately eliminating these disparities is a core mission of the Department of Health and Senior Services and it has been my top priority since I became commissioner in December of 2004. Since that time, the Department has sustained and launched programs targeted to minority communities.

However, disparities persist. In the wealthiest state in the nation, I know that we can do better. Hence, the Department is continually considering promising strategies. For the first time, the Department of Health and Senior Services has developed a *Strategic Plan to Eliminate Health Disparities*—a comprehensive plan of action to improve the health of racial and ethnic minorities in this state. This document—which will continue to evolve—is our roadmap to reduce health disparities over the next three years.

We will measure our progress against the benchmarks outlined in this document. We look forward to collaborating with academia, community-based organizations, health care and other public health professionals as we work together to achieve our goal of eliminating health disparities in New Jersey.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Fred M. Jacobs".

Fred M. Jacobs, M.D., J.D.
Commissioner