



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Francine Knowles
(312) 403-0023
Fknowles@danielleashley.com

**'First Ladies' at 70 Chicago area churches to tackle health disparities --
Expanding initiative will have impact here and in South Africa**

CHICAGO, IL - African-American women church leaders in the Chicago area will join forces to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS and other illnesses which reflect health disparities in their communities, and their efforts, which have already helped save lives locally, now will have impact across the globe.

The First Ladies Health Initiative, comprised of pastors' wives from 70 churches in Chicago and Northwest Indiana, is partnering with sponsor Walgreens as well as bioLytical Laboratories and the Bishop Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation to offer free health tests simultaneously at churches here, Sunday, September 27.

Some 30,000 tests are expected to be administered for high blood pressure, diabetes, breast cancer, hepatitis C, HIV/AIDS and other illnesses that disproportionately affect African-Americans.

In an exciting new venture, bioLytical will donate 800 of their INSTI® 60-second rapid HIV testing kits here, and for every test administered during the Chicago First Ladies Health Day, bioLytical also will donate a free INSTI® HIV test to the Bishop Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation in South Africa.

The seventh annual free health day is open to church members and the community at large.

The First Ladies Health Initiative, launched in Chicago in 2008, has enabled more than 75,000 individuals to get screened for illnesses. The effort has expanded to now include Gary, IN, Los Angeles, Orange County, CA, and Cincinnati, OH.

First Ladies Health Initiative Executive Director Tracey Alston welcomes the new partnership with bioLytical.

**8 South Michigan Av, Ste 1600 Chicago, IL 60603 312.470.0270
Firstladieshealth.com**

“This amazing partnership brings us closer to achieving our goal of reducing healthcare disparities throughout the world,” she said. “When someone takes an HIV test during our First Ladies Health Day, they are also providing a potentially life-saving test to someone in Africa.”

The health day has made a difference locally over the years.

“We had a woman whose blood pressure was so high that they were going to call an ambulance, but she didn’t want to go in like that,” said Salem Baptist Church of Chicago First Lady Jamell Meeks, chair of the initiative. “She wanted to go on her own. So she did, and was hospitalized for three days while hospital personnel stabilized her pressure. She would have definitely been a stroke victim, if she hadn’t had the opportunity to have her blood pressure checked on the health day.

“On the first health day, we had a woman in her 60s who tested positive for HIV,” Meeks added. “It was great to be able to have her find that out, and get into treatment.”

African-Americans accounted for an estimated 44 percent of all new HIV infections among adults and adolescents, despite representing only 12 percent of the U.S. population, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Meanwhile, incidents of hepatitis, diabetes, hypertension, obesity and other systemic illnesses are epidemic in the African-American community.

“We take great pride in helping thousands of community residents in the Chicago area through the First Ladies Health Day,” said Walgreens’ Director of Community Affairs John Gremer. “This important partnership with the First Ladies Health Initiative is indicative of Walgreens’ commitment to positively and proactively help improve the health of our consumers.”

“bioLytical’s INSTI HIV-1/HIV-2 Antibody Test is perfect in outreach settings as it is the only test on the market that offers results in as little as 60 seconds,” said Rick Galli, Chief Technical Officer of bioLytical Laboratories. “We are pleased to partner with the First Ladies Health Initiative and the Desmond Tutu HIV foundation to increase access to HIV testing both locally and globally.”

Tests will be performed by Walgreens pharmacists and health volunteers from Gilead, Harmony Health Plan of Illinois, the nursing schools of UIC, Rush University Medical Center and the City Colleges of Chicago, Oak Street Health and the AIDs Foundation of Chicago and more.

Pharmacists also will be equipped to administer flu immunizations, and each church will receive CPR kits and demonstrations from the American Heart Association and Illinois Heart Rescue. Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Illinois will be available at several churches to counsel participants on insurance options.

About The Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation

**8 South Michigan Av, Ste 1600 Chicago, IL 60603 312.470.0270
Firstladieshealth.com**

The Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation is a center of excellence for HIV and TB research. The foundation is a not-for-profit organization that has operated in association with the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Cape Town since 2004. It works in partnership with government health agencies and local and international partners to upscale and improve the management and treatment of HIV and tuberculosis and related infections.

About First Ladies Health Initiative

The First Ladies Health Initiative holds a FREE Health Day annually in Chicago, Northwest Indiana, Los Angeles and Orange County, CA; and Cincinnati, OH. The initiative is designed to bring awareness to illnesses that disproportionately affect African-Americans and Latinos and to offer FREE health screenings to individuals in their communities. The program begins with an Annual Luncheon attended by nearly 200 pastors' wives for the purpose of recruiting them to host the FREE health screenings at their churches during our First Ladies Health Day. Visit www.FirstLadiesHealth.com