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Health Reception Honors and Educates Detroit's Black Elders

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DETROIT – Long life, healthy body, sharp brain, caring friends: top goals for any older adult. The Healthier Black Elders Reception, hosted by Wayne State's Institute of Gerontology, specifically educates Detroit's older African Americans to achieve these goals. The annual reception, held June 11 at Greater Grace Conference Center, caps a year filled with community seminars, health screenings, and learning series designed to close the health gap between African Americans and Caucasians. Older African Americans are more likely than their Caucasian counterparts to suffer diabetes, hypertension, heart disease and certain cancers as they age. The Healthier Black Elders Center researches why and educates seniors and professionals to help prevent these discrepancies.

The Health Reception offers panel discussions, expert speakers, gentle exercise, health screenings, comedy, and a nutritious lunch to encourage guests to care for their health. In community forums, Detroit's older African Americans voiced concern about the Affordable Care Act's impact on Medicare and Medicaid services. To address this issue, keynote Gwen Sampson, deputy regional administrator of the Center of Medicare Medicaid Services, will discuss the affordable care initiative and field audience questions. The morning panel includes a specialist in dementia and caregiving, a nutritionist specializing in diabetes, and Peter Lichtenberg, a neuropsychologist and director of the Institute of Gerontology.

"Our mission is to improve the health and well-being of Detroit's older adults," Lichtenberg said. "Over the past 11 years, our annual reception has reached thousands of seniors with critical messages about preventive care, vulnerabilities to certain diseases, and early warning signs. We've also encouraged more than 1,500 older African Americans to register to participate in research studies, so we can uncover why African Americans are more vulnerable to certain diseases than other ethnic groups."

The Healthier Black Elders Center is jointly run by the Institute of Gerontology and the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research. This collaboration, called the Michigan Center for Urban African American Aging Research, has been continuously funded since 1997 by the National Institute of Aging. In addition to hosting the reception, the Center mentors minority scholars to investigate health issues prevalent in minority aging.

The Institute of Gerontology researches the aging process, educates students in gerontology, and presents programs on aging issues relevant to professionals, caregivers and older adults in the community (www.iog.wayne.edu). The Institute is part of the Division of Research at Wayne State University, one of the nation's preeminent public research institutions in an urban setting. For more information about research at Wayne State University, visit <http://www.research.wayne.edu>.

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