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**Joint Center Commission Will Focus on Role of Expectant Fathers in Healthier Pregnancies and Babies**

WASHINGTON – The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies today convened a new *Commission on Paternal Involvement in Pregnancy Outcomes* to raise public awareness of how greater involvement by expectant fathers can improve maternal and child health.

The Commission is co-chaired by Michael Lu, M.D., MPH, an Associate Professor of obstetrics and gynecology and public health at UCLA's Schools of Medicine and Public Health in Los Angeles, and Willie J. Parker, M.D., MPH, Medical Director of Planned Parenthood of Metropolitan Washington, DC.

During their meeting today at the Joint Center, Commission members identified factors that discourage fathers-to-be from playing an active role during pregnancy. The panel developed guidelines that can be incorporated in research, public health policy and clinical practice that recognize the important role expectant and new fathers can play in family health matters, and to encourage their participation during and after pregnancy.

The Joint Center is a leading public policy and research institution whose work focuses primarily on African Americans and other communities of color, and the Commission's work will place special emphasis on the problems of African American expectant fathers.

Low birthweight and preterm birth are leading risk factors for infant mortality, which in turn is an important indicator of the health of a nation. The United States ranks 29th in infant mortality among developed countries. The infant mortality rate for non-Hispanic black women was 2.4 times the rate for non-Hispanic white women, according to the National Center for Health Statistics.

Seventy percent of African American children are born to unmarried mothers and 40 percent of all American children live in homes without fathers.

“The Commission is initiating important work that will lead to healthier mothers and babies and stronger families,” said Ralph B. Everett, President and CEO of the Joint Center. “We believe the Commission will be a catalyst for positive changes in policies, programs, personal behavior and clinical practice.”

“This is about building a movement to change the way we perceive the man's role during pregnancy and to make sure that fathers-to-be understand how their involvement can make a profound difference in the lives of their pregnant partners and children,” said Dr. Jermane Bond, the Joint Center Research Associate who is directing the work of the Commission. “Ultimately, we want all young men to accept their share of responsibility and embrace their proper roles during pregnancy.”

The Commission’s work is funded with a grant from the Office of Minority Health in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

In addition to the chairpersons, other commission members are:

***Allen Herman, M.D., Ph.D.***, founding Dean of the National School of Public Health, Medical University of Southern Africa, Republic of South Africa, Pretoria.

***Bryant Marks, Ph.D.***, Assistant Professor of Psychology and Director of the Morehouse Male Initiative, Morehouse College, Atlanta, GA.

***Yolanda C. Padilla, MSSW, Ph.D.***, Professor of Social Work and Women’s and Gender Studies, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

***Audra Robertson, M.D., MPH***, Clinical Director, Birth Equity Initiative: Eliminating the Racial Disparity in Infant Mortality, Brigham and Women’s Hospital Center for Community Health and Health Equity.

***Roland Warren***, President of the National Fatherhood Initiative in Washington, DC.

***Kimberlee Wyche-Etheridge, M.D., MPH***, Director, Bureau of Family, Youth and Infant Health, Metro Nashville Davidson County Public Health Department, Nashville, TN.

***Pete Thomas, MD***, Medical Director, Project Brotherhood, Chicago, IL.

*The Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies is one of the nation’s leading research and public policy institutions and the only one whose work focuses primarily on issues of particular concern to African Americans and other people of color. It will mark its 40th Anniversary of service in 2010. For more information about the Joint Center, please visit our Web site at [www.jointcenter.org](http://www.jointcenter.org).*

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