



Program Fact Sheet: *Strengthening the Heart of Georgia*

The Need: Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women in Georgia.¹ And as the numbers indicate, many women in Georgia are at significant risk of developing heart disease: 19% report smoking, 27% are obese, 27% have high blood pressure, 37% have high cholesterol, and 60% are physically inactive.²

Heart disease affects women of all races, socioeconomic, and educational status. However, this disease disproportionately affects African American women, who constitute 31% of Georgia's female population, as well as women with low income and education levels. Unfortunately, many women continue to underestimate their risk for heart disease, many are misdiagnosed, and many don't receive proper treatment.

WomenHeart, the National Coalition for Women with Heart Disease: WomenHeart was established in 1999 to serve women living with or at risk of heart disease by providing accurate information about the prevention, early detection, accurate diagnosis, and proper treatment of heart disease. WomenHeart offers patient support services to women with heart disease and advocates for public policies that will improve women's heart health and access to quality care.

Guided by a Scientific Advisory Council comprised of leading cardiologists and women's health experts, WomenHeart's programs and services include:

- **WomenHeart Science & Leadership Symposium at Mayo Clinic**, which trains women heart disease survivors to become *WomenHeart Champions* – volunteer community educators, advocates and patient support network leaders. The Symposium focuses on the medical aspects and science of heart disease, public speaking, and how to conduct community outreach activities. WomenHeart's approach relies on peer-to-peer communication, combined with the power of each woman's personal story about living with heart disease. Currently, there are 518 volunteer *WomenHeart Champions* nationwide -- the "boots on the ground" -- in the fight against heart disease.

¹ Bryan L. 2007 Women's Health in Georgia. Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health, October 11, 2007.

² Progress towards Healthy People 2010 Objectives, Georgia, 2002-2007. Georgia Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, Georgia Department of Human Resources, Division of Public Health.

- **Peer-to-peer support groups for women living with heart disease** conducted at hospitals and other local organizations. Support, ongoing education, and secondary prevention are crucial to a woman's recovery, her well being, and that of her family. Based on a WomenHeart training program for support network leaders and an educational curriculum created by the Minneapolis Heart Institute Foundation, women heart patients are trained to establish and lead local support networks. Currently, 73 patient support networks are active nationwide.
- **Online patient support community** – which currently has 5,600 registered members – where women can participate in a patient forum and the “Sister Match Program,” that pairs newly diagnosed women with trained volunteers who can provide peer support.

The Program: *Strengthening the Heart of Georgia* is the first statewide replication of WomenHeart's national program, which will serve as a model for other states in the future. This program is made possible through the generous support of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Georgia Foundation. It is designed to raise awareness of the importance of women's heart health, empower women to prevent heart disease, and to provide support to women living with heart disease through patient support networks and WomenHeart's online community.

Implementation Sites: The program will be implemented in ten key Georgia communities, which were selected based on their prevalence of heart disease and population size, including: Atlanta, John's Creek, Marietta, Athens, Macon, Augusta, Columbus, Albany, Valdosta, and Savannah. Program elements include:

- **Recruit and train 40 women heart disease survivors from Georgia** to become *WomenHeart Champions* and Patient Support Network Coordinators at a three-day WomenHeart Science & Leadership Symposium to be held in Atlanta, February 17-20, 2012. The faculty – drawn from Georgia and nationally -- will include experts in women's health and cardiology, public health, mental health, and communications. Four women from each of the ten identified communities will be selected to participate in the Symposium.
- **Conduct heart health education in the ten key communities**, including media outreach, presentations by *WomenHeart Champions*, and special events. At least five events will be conducted in each community during March through June 2012. WomenHeart's national office will assist these newly trained *WomenHeart Champions* in building partnerships with local organizations and scheduling the events. After the initial pilot phase, this established state-wide network of community educators will continue to engage in outreach activities.
- **Establish peer-led patient support networks at hospitals and other locations** for women living with heart disease. Meeting on a monthly basis, these groups will focus primarily on secondary prevention and providing emotional support to women living with heart disease. The goal is to establish at least one support group in each community, which will meet together over the long term.

How You Can Get Involved!

- **Encourage women to apply to become a *WomenHeart Champion*!** Identify women heart patients in your community that you would like to recommend for participation in the Symposium. On October 14th, women will be able to access the application online by going to www.womenheart.org. You can also make copies of the application available to patients. If you have any questions, please e-mail heartofgeorgia@womenheart.org or call 202-728-7199.
- **Partner with *WomenHeart Champions* to conduct community events.** *WomenHeart Champions* will be encouraged to partner with local organization, clinicians and hospitals to provide heart health education to women, particularly those at increased risk. Potential partners could include worksites, places of worship, civic organizations, health care settings, and popular commercial outlets. If you are interested in partnering with a *WomenHeart Champion* or having a *WomenHeart Champion* speak at your event or organization, please e-mail heartofgeorgia@womenheart.org or contact Susan Gilbert at sgilbert@womenheart.org or 202-464-8737.
- **Host a support group at your hospital or organization.** During the symposium, women will be trained to establish support networks in their communities. However, each group requires an institutional home, which can be a hospital, clinic, faith-based organization, or other accessible setting. If you are interested in hosting a support group, please email Chinenye Anyanwu at canyanwu@womenheart.org.

How Will Women Be Selected? This is a competitive application process in which women will be selected based on the strength of their application, recommendations, ethnic diversity, and geographic location. Women will be notified when their application has been received and if they have been accepted. A total of forty women, with equal representation from the ten communities, will be invited to participate.

For additional information:

For *Strengthening the Heart of Georgia* please contact heartofgeorgia@womenheart.org or Susan Gilbert, Project Director, at 202-464-8737 or Chinenye Anyanwu, Manager Patient Support and Volunteer Services, at 202-464-8744.

For more information about WomenHeart, please visit www.womenheart.org