

## Who?

The Aurora Circle of Wise Women warmly invites all Aurora African American women who want to help end the disparities in health and survival for African American infants. The Circle is also available to share information about our Circle with African American women groups in the community and in congregations. The Circle counts on many other community partners to assist in activities that are tailored to eliminate the African American disparity in infant mortality!

Founding member, Toya Johnson, RN, encourages involvement in the Circle.



“One of the beauties of the Circle is how we embrace every aspect of the community. In seeking to promote health and wellness of the baby, and family as a whole, we recognize the importance of including our local faith communities and other organizations. The circle exhibits effective partnership on a mission to achieve one goal — saving our babies. The African Proverb says, ‘it takes a village to raise a child...’ and the Circle is a true example of that!”

## What?

The Circle of Wise Women is a group of African American community women committed to acting together to reduce the number of our babies that die before they celebrate their first birthdays.

**The mission of the Circle of Wise Women is:** Improve infant wellness and survival through education and prevention by increasing health awareness within the African American community; create a circle of change by promoting healthy behavior and increase the circle of life by surrounding parents and infants with strong, loving community bonds.

## Where?

The Aurora Circle of Wise Women meets monthly, eleven months a year on the third Monday from 2:00-4:00 p.m. at the Fred Rodgers Community Center  
501 College Avenue  
Aurora, Illinois 60505  
For more information about the Aurora Circle of Wise Women, our meetings, and activities, please call:  
**(630) 232-5926**

## Community Support

Many of the activities require funding or other support. The Aurora Circle of Wise Women seeks support through community partners, grant funding, and sponsorship for health events and messages.

If you would like to support this very worthwhile and life-improving work by becoming a partner with us through sponsorship, funding, or supporting our activities in other ways, please contact us by attending a meeting or calling 630-232-5926.

Website:

[kanehealth.com/aurora-circle.htm](http://kanehealth.com/aurora-circle.htm)

## Aurora

## Circle of Wise Women



*Circle of Wise Women:  
African American Women  
working to improve  
the health and survival  
of our babies!*

# Why?

Infant mortality is an important indicator of the overall health of a community. Infant mortality refers to the number of infant deaths per 1000 live births before age 1. The infant mortality rate for Kane County for the most recent year available, 2007, is 4.4.

However, the mortality rate for African American infants in Kane County remains higher than this 4.4 rate for all babies in the county. The gap/disparity in infant mortality among races/ethnicities is usually reported in five year periods. For 1997-2001, African American infant mortality (20.1) was **three** times higher than infant mortality for all Kane County babies (6.9). This mortality gap decreased by the 2003-2007 period : **twice** as many African American babies died before their first birthday (12.2) compared to all babies in Kane County (5.7). This gap, though it has narrowed, is still an unacceptable disparity. The Aurora Circle of Wise Women is working to assure that the infant mortality gap between African American and other infants is **completely eliminated!**

In 2006, the Kane County Health Department, together with many community members and leaders, completed a county-wide needs assessment called the **IPLAN**—short for Illinois Plan for Local Assessment of Need. Disparities in maternal and child health emerged as one of the top five priorities of the **IPLAN**. Infant mortality among African American babies proved to be the highest concern.

Based in large measure on this IPLAN assessment, and in response to the Health Department's request, Alderwoman Scheketa Hart-Burns in Aurora, in 2006, convened a Circle of Wise Women to plan a coordinated approach to improve the health and survival of African American infants in Kane County.



# Issues?

Among the specific issues affecting African American health and survival are low birth weight, preterm labor (before 37 weeks), prematurity, small size for gestational age, infection, stress, and poor prenatal weight gain. Higher rates of infant mortality persist across all ages, income levels, and educational levels of African American women.

These issues need a community touch , as Tish Benberry, RN, a founding member of the Aurora Circle says:



“I enjoy being a part of the Aurora Circle of Wise Women because it has given me an opportunity to work with wonderful people in our community on a passion that I have had as a childbirth educator and nurse for years, promoting the health of mothers, babies and families and also reducing infant death and illness. Through the Circle I have been able to share with African American community groups information on the importance of prenatal care and prenatal vitamins, how to have a healthy pregnancy, signs of premature labor, the warning signs of pregnancy and even strategies for empowering parents.”



# Actions?

The Aurora Circle of Wise Women took the time to study the data and the issues that surround infant mortality and illness. They also reviewed actions other communities have taken to improve health and wellness for African American infants. Since then, the Aurora Circle has taken action to help other women learn about African American infant mortality and take whatever preventive measures are possible.

The Aurora Circle of Wise Women implements new community activities to keep babies healthier:

- ◆ Poster campaigns to prevent premature births
- ◆ Annual “It’s a Family Affair” Barbeque to enhance awareness and prevention
- ◆ Baby showers for African American mothers that combine fun with education that decreases infant mortality — in partnership with the Main Baptist Church, Progressive Baptist Church, New Community Church, Life Springs, Pregnancy Information Center, Provena Mercy Medical Center, the Visiting Nurse Association, and the Kane County Health Department
- ◆ Outreach to African Americans in the larger housing complexes
- ◆ Surveys and town hall meetings for Aurora African American women about health issues and communication with doctors

The Aurora Circle of Wise Women participates in many community activities:

- ◆ Exhibits and promotes health at the annual Aurora African American Health Fair
- ◆ Provide outreach and education in the community at special events and churches
- ◆ State level infant mortality planning and input
- ◆ Partners frequently with local churches, health providers, hospitals, community organizations and local health department

◀ Born at 26.5 weeks and weighing just 1 pound and 9 ounces, this Aurora infant born prematurely with low birth weight had to fight hard for her life and health! The Aurora Circle of Wise Women hopes to make this fight easier for other African American infants — and especially to prevent countless more infants to have the fight at all!