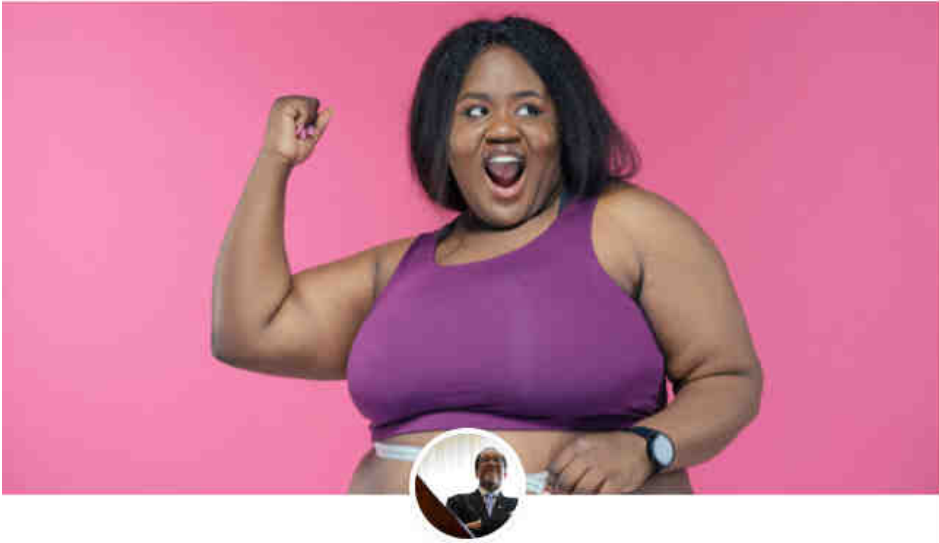


DETROIT

Op Ed: The obesity crisis is not a hopeless Fight for Black America



By Dr. Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.

Whether we accept it or not, obesity continues to be a complex, chronic disease that kills thousands of Black Americans every year. Indeed, nearly half of Black Americans live with obesity, so we cannot afford to ignore this national emergency any longer.

The public discourse around weight loss that has taken over recent headlines has entirely missed the mark. Our mainstream media, social media, and content providers are all either dissecting whether a movie star used weight loss medication or analyzing whether these medications are safe to take, even though they're FDA approved.

The fact of the matter is that we are squandering a critical moment to focus on the deadly disease of obesity, and missing the opportunity to save thousands of lives, particularly Black lives. Within the next seven years, researchers anticipate that half of American adults will live with obesity. This is a personal health burden and a public health crisis, and we should talk about it as such.

Turning the narrative around on this disease, and on Black wellness overall, is critical to stemming obesity's growth. The National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), a trade association of more than 250 Black-owned community newspapers and media companies from across the United States, has consistently been the voice of the Black community since its founding 83 years ago.

I serve as the organization's President and CEO and right now, we're calling on our members to elevate the conversation on the obesity crisis to one that clarifies the facts, shares reliable resources, and advocates for impactful changes for the benefit of our community's health and longevity. We can address obesity in a way that gives hope, because this is not a hopeless fight.

To start, it's vital that we correct the misinformation. Too often, people don't know that obesity is a chronic disease and a long-term illness, with multiple contributing factors outside of a person's control: environmental circumstances, inherently racist healthcare programs, poverty, and genetics. In cities across the country, like Washington, D.C., where nearly half the population is Black, food deserts and food swamps have become the norm in Black communities. This makes it nearly impossible for many Black residents to eat well

even if they wanted to. That is to say, many people cannot access one of the key tools for combating obesity — a healthy diet — because of factors outside of their control.

It's also important to note that obesity is a complex disease that may require more than diet and exercise. Our understanding of the disease has changed drastically over the years thanks to scientific research and advances. Where diet and exercise are not enough, some people may need the extra support of anti-obesity medications to fight the disease. Just as many of us take medications to manage hypertension, diabetes, or cholesterol — conditions you may have inherited — medications for chronic weight management may be needed as well.

Further, combating severe obesity may even require bariatric surgery. Chronic diseases are treated with a range of treatment options, and obesity is no different.

To be clear, the perception that people who live with obesity just need to take better care of themselves is false and dangerous, as it prevents thousands from receiving or seeking the care they need. Societal weight biases strain the mental health of people living by obesity, prevent people from living their healthiest lives, and contribute to our country's stagnant healthcare policies that exacerbate obesity's disproportionate impact on Black communities.

From less access to quality healthcare, to the exclusion of anti-obesity medications from Medicare, and most Medicaid and general insurance coverage, our healthcare systems under-prioritizes the well-being of Black Americans. And we've learned from history that until we make our voices heard, this crisis will continue to be brushed aside.

Dr. Fatima Cody Stanford, an expert on obesity, noted that we have been living through three pandemics: COVID-19, racism, and obesity. We must prioritize combating the obesity pandemic with the same energy we use to combat COVID-19 and racial injustice. Our lives depend on it.

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NATIVE SUN

California panel takes big step toward \$800 billion reparation payments to Black residents, and Formal apology

By Stacy M. Brown
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California's reparations task panel approved recommendations to compensate and apologize to Black communities for centuries of discrimination.

At a meeting in Oakland, the nine-member committee, which first met nearly two years ago, approved a lengthy list of reparations recommendations for state lawmakers to examine.

At the meeting, U.S. Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.), called on states and the federal government to implement reparations legislation.

Lee said reparations are morally justified and could solve historical racial imbalances and inequality.

The panel's first vote accepted a detailed assessment of Black Californian discrimination in voting, housing, education, disproportionate policing and incarceration, and others.

Other suggestions included creating a new organization to serve descendants of enslaved people and calculating what the state owes them.

"An apology and an admission of wrongdoing alone is not going to be satisfactory," said Chris Lodgson, an organizer with the Coalition for a Just and Equitable California, a reparations advocacy group.

The task force's draft recommendation requires parliamentarians to "censure the gravest barbarities" on behalf of the state in their apologies.

The task force noted that California's first elected governor, Peter Hardeman Burnett, was a white supremacist who supported legislation excluding Black people from the state.

The draft report states that California, a "free" state since 1850, did not pass any laws guaranteeing freedom for all. Instead, the state Supreme Court enforced the federal Fugitive Slave Act for over a decade until freedom arrived in U.S. states.

"By participating in these horrors, California further perpetuated the harms African Americans faced, imbuing racial prejudice throughout society through segregation, public and private discrimination, and unequal state and federal funding," the study authors wrote.

The task team adopted a public apology, admitting the state's past wrongs and committing not to repeat them.

It would be presented to the descendants of enslaved people.

California apologized for interning Japanese Americans and mistreating Native Americans.

The panel adopted the draft report's "cash or its equivalent" restitution for qualified residents.

Oakland's Mills College of North-eastern University hosted over 100 citizens and activists. All lamented the country's "broken promise" to give emancipated slaves 40 acres and a mule.

Many claimed it was time for governments to fix the harms that prevented African Americans from living without fear of being wrongly punished, maintaining property, and earning wealth.

Former Black Panther Party chairwoman Elaine Brown encouraged protests.

The task force meeting was viewed as a pivotal moment in the push for local, state, and federal agencies to apologize for African American discrimination.

"There's no way in the world that many of these recommendations are going to get through because of the inflationary impact," said University of San Diego School of Law professor and reparations specialist Roy L. Brooks.

Economists predict the state may owe Black residents \$800 billion, or 2.5 times its yearly budget.

The newest task force draft report has a much lower figure.

In 2020, Secretary of State Shirley Weber, a former Democratic assemblymember, authored legislation creating the task force to address the state's historical culpability for African American harms, not as a substitute for federal reparations.

The task team initially limited reparations to descendants of 19th-century enslaved or free Black individuals. As reparations for African Americans have had uneven success elsewhere, the group's work has received national attention.

Black residents in the Chicago suburb of Evanston, Illinois, recently received housing vouchers as reparations, but few reportedly used them.

A bill to acknowledge the inhumanity of slavery in New York and form a panel to investigate reparations proposals has cleared the Assembly but not the Senate.

A decades-old federal proposal to form a reparations panel for African Americans has stalled in Congress.

Oakland City Council member Kevin Jenkins called the California task group "a powerful example" of what can happen when people work together.

Jenkins stated, "I am confident that through our collective efforts, we can significantly advance reparations in our great state of California and, ultimately, the country."



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