



Founded in 1996 by Toni M. Bond and Winnette P. Willis, the mission of **AAWE** is to increase the activism and leadership of Black women around reproductive health. AAWE works to create a direct response from Black women at the grassroots level to social and economic policies that impact their overall reproductive health.

### References

<sup>1</sup>J. Zhang, G. Thomas, E. Leybovich. "Vaginal Douching and Adverse Health Effects: A Meta-analysis." American Journal of Public Health. 1997; 87:1201-11.

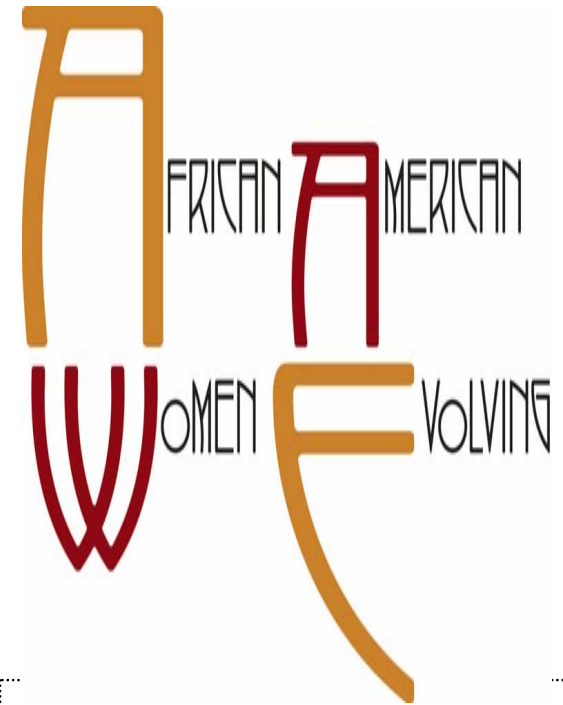
<sup>2</sup>In its August, 2001 *Clinical Proceedings*<sup>®</sup>, the Association of Reproductive Health Professionals noted that, "Self-treatment by women for vulvovaginal symptoms is estimated to incur significant costs in over-the-counter medications each...up to two-thirds of these self-diagnoses are thought to be inaccurate."

<sup>3</sup>African American Women Evolving, "Differences In Dignity: Race, Class & the Reproductive Health of Black Women." Executive Summary, 2001.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

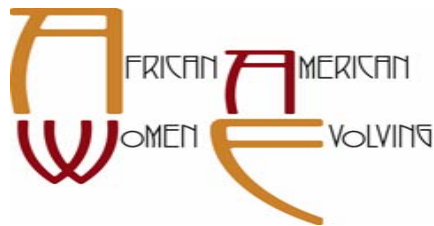
<sup>5</sup>InteliHealth, Health News. "To Douche or Not To Douche? Jury's Still Out." Cox News Service. 2 0 0 1 ; <http://www.intelihealth.com/IH/ihtIH/WSIHW000/333/343/312827.html>.

<sup>6</sup>Nyirjesy P, Weitz MV, Grody MH, Lorber B. "Over-the-Counter and Alternative Medicines in the Treatment of Chronic Vaginal Symptoms." Department of Obstetrics, Gynecology, and Reproductive Sciences, Temple University School of Medicine, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. 1997;90:50-53.



**THE  
HEALTHY VAGINA  
CAMPAIGN™**

# The Healthy Vagina Campaign™



## ***African American Women Douche at Higher Rates***

Despite growing scientific evidence highlighting the health risks, douching is still a regular practice. It is more prevalent among African American women.

►The Centers for Disease Control estimates that approximately 27% (an estimated 16 million) of U.S. women ages 15-44 douche regularly. Over half of those women are African American and 21% are Caucasian.

►In its 2000-2001 survey of 300 African American women, AAWE found that over half (52%) of the women douched, with 37% douching on the average, once per month.<sup>3</sup>

►Twenty-three percent of the women AAWE surveyed douched more than once per month.<sup>4</sup>

## ***Making Money Off of Women's Vaginas***

A key reason why women continue to douche is the aggressive advertising done by feminine hygiene manufacturers. Advertisements about vaginal odors, post-menstrual bleeding, and maintaining a "clean, crisp" feeling have been passed on to women by douche manufacturers. Manufacturers have, in turn, profited to the tune of approximately **\$144 million** annually.<sup>5</sup> Women add to their annual health care costs by spending as much as **\$500** per year for over-the-counter vaginal products.<sup>6</sup>

## **Get Involved With The HVC!**

►Medical professionals (physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, health workers, medical students), join The HVC Medical Advisory Committee.

►Community organizers, students, or concerned individuals, lend your skills and talents to The HVC.

►If you work with a women's or community group, get them to be a collaborative partner to The HVC.

There are many ways to be a part of The HVC. The HVC needs expertise in the areas of community organizing, marketing and public relations, policy and advocacy, data collection and research, etc.

For more information about the HVC contact AAWE at 312/566-0983.

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### ***About the Campaign***

The Healthy Vagina Campaign™ (The HVC) seeks to create a diverse response to the sanitization of women's bodies. The HVC's primary goals are: 1) to inform women of the potential risks associated with douching and 2) to advocate for stricter review and regulation of the companies that manufacture feminine hygiene products.

### ***Douching and Reproductive***

#### ***Tract Infections (RTIs)***

Numerous studies have linked douching and sexually transmitted diseases, upper cervical infections, and the low birth-weight of babies. Women who douche have a 73% increased risk of pelvic inflammatory disease, a 76% increased risk of ectopic pregnancy, and an 86% increased risk for cervical cancer.<sup>1</sup> The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommends that women avoid douching because it can hide symptoms of an infection or push the infection farther up into the reproductive tract. For example, vulvovaginitis is the most common RTI that women try to self-treat.<sup>2</sup>