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Essence Carson and Health Equity Initiative Launch *Sports for Health Equity* *WNBA All-Star Calls for Community Action and Individual Pledges to Address Health Disparities*

New York, N.Y., August 30, 2012. Today the non-profit organization Health Equity Initiative (HEI) launched an educational campaign with the goal of raising awareness of health disparities in the U.S. Essence Carson – WNBA All-Star, New York Liberty player, recording artist, writer, and producer – joins HEI to promote *Sports for Health Equity*, a national program designed to raise awareness of health disparities, and encourage community action and partnerships for health equity.

The centerpiece of *Sports for Health Equity* is a video featuring Essence Carson telling her personal story of how she became interested in health equity, and some of her priority action areas. The video is intended to raise awareness of health disparities and to encourage community participation. Other program elements include a basketball shoot-a-thon program for schools across the U.S., a curriculum on health equity, and virtual or community-based town halls and forums. Students, families, teachers, local community members and businesses, and the public at large can view the video and learn how they can help make progress towards health equity by visiting:

<http://www.healthequityinitiative.org/he/what-we-do/sports-for-health-equity>

While countless reports show that disadvantaged groups suffer higher rates of disease, injury and death than more privileged groups and/or the general population, only 59% of US adults are aware of the significant *health disparities* (differences in health outcomes and/or diseases or health conditions that are more common and/or more severe among underserved and vulnerable groups) that continue to undermine the ability of many U.S. communities to thrive and connect with economic and social opportunities.

“Addressing health equity is important to me because disparities are a problem that's been prevalent in our communities throughout many decades, and there is still a significant absence of conversation on this issue.,” said Essence Carson. “I encourage everyone to watch my Sports for Health Equity video and share it with their friends – you can start the conversation!”

Focusing on sport as a key community-building activity that supports healthy lifestyles and brings together people from diverse backgrounds, *Sports for Health Equity* seeks to engage the public, families, students, teachers, local communities and businesses to enhance understanding of health disparities and their contributing factors. Via its programs, Health Equity Initiative helps communities and professionals from multiple sectors join together to devise their own sustainable solutions and/or influence future programs and policies.

“Providing every person with the same opportunity to stay healthy and effectively cope with disease – in other words, health equity - is critical to a functioning society. Yet, within one decade awareness of health disparities in the U.S. has only improved from 54.5% to 59%, while disparities have persisted - and in some cases - increased among disadvantaged groups.” said Renata Schiavo, PhD, MA, Founding President and CEO, Health Equity Initiative. “*Sports for Health Equity* seeks to change that. We hope everyone will visit our web site and learn how to take action within their families and communities.”

Health disparities are linked to diverse factors, which include socio-economic conditions, race, ethnicity and culture, as well as having access to health care services, a built environment that supports physical activity, neighborhoods with accessible and affordable nutritious food, well-designed housing that is sited to minimize community exposure to environmental and other health hazards, efficient transportation that enable vulnerable groups to connect with services and support systems, culturally appropriate health information that accurately reflects literacy levels, and caring and friendly clinical settings. Communities with greater disparities experience higher rates of infant mortality, higher incidence of disease, and lower life expectancy, with a significant impact on their children’s ability to thrive and long-term consequences for community productivity and well-being. Combined costs of health inequities in the US. totaled \$1.24 trillion from 2003 to 2006.

About Health Equity Initiative (HEI)

Health Equity Initiative (HEI) is a federally recognized 501c3 non-profit organization dedicated to building community, capacity and communication resources for health equity. Health Equity Initiative works to encourage community action and partnerships in support of health equity while building capacity of other organizations and establishing a research-based roadmap toward progress.

Visit our website at <http://www.healthequityinitiative.org>. Follow HEI @HlthEquityInit. Join HEI on [Linkedin](#). Like Us on [Facebook](#). Visit our You Tube Channel at <http://www.youtube.com/user/HlthEquityInitiative>

About Essence Carson

Described by Euroleague Women as “an explosive scorer” and “one of the most musically gifted basketball players in the world”, Essence Carson, WNBA All Star, NY Liberty player, recording artist, writer and producer, joins Health Equity Initiative as a celebrity ambassador to encourage community action and partnerships for health equity. A native of Paterson, New Jersey, Essence currently plays with the NY Liberty as their guard-forward, and during the 2012 off-season, for Spain’s Rivas Ecopolis, which is the number 3 team in that country. A graduate of Rosa Parks School for Fine and Performing Arts in New Jersey, Carson is a talented musician and music producer who plays the piano, drums, and bass. She recently debuted as a hip-hop artist under the name Pr3pe (pronounced “Preppy”). Past accomplishments include the 2004 U.S. Women’s Junior World Championship, gold medalist at the 2005 FIBA Under-19 World Championship, gold medalist at the 2006 USA FIBA America’s Under-20 Championship, Defensive Player of the Year for three consecutive seasons in the Big East Conference (only the second female player in history receiving this honor). For a full bio and additional information, go to: www.essencecarson.com