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On Friday, February 5, 2010, join the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI) as well as millions of people across the United States in celebration of Wear Red Day.[®] Created in 2002 by the *Heart Truth* campaign, Wear Red Day[®] brought an urgent message to women; cardiovascular disease is the number one killer of both women and men.

A survey about women and heart disease conducted in 2000 showed that only 34 percent of the women polled knew that heart disease was the leading cause of death in women. According to NHLBI, most women at that time believed that breast cancer was the leading cause of death in women. Heart disease was considered a “man’s disease.” Heart disease was responsible for the death of one in three women in 2000, compared to one in thirty women dying from breast cancer. In fact, heart disease continues to kill more women than all types of cancer combined.

One of the ten essential services of public health is to “inform, educate and empower people about health issues.” Women and heart disease is an extremely important public health issue. The purpose of the *Heart Truth* campaign is to inform and educate the public about cardiovascular disease. The most important component is to empower women to take action to reduce their risk of the disease.

The campaign is geared in particular to women between the ages of 40 and 60, but it can benefit women of any age. Heart disease develops slowly and can begin in the teen years. However, the risk for developing heart disease is greater as a person ages. In addition, African American and Hispanic women are disproportionately affected by the risk factors that lead to heart disease. Risk factors include heredity, inactivity, obesity and type 2 diabetes. A person’s family history of heart disease cannot be changed, but the other major risk factors can be affected by changes in lifestyle choices.

Based on social marketing techniques and research, the Wear Red Day[®] and the *Heart Truth* campaign have proven to be effective. Recent surveys have shown that women are not only more aware of their risk for developing heart disease, they are taking action to reduce the risk factors that may lead to the development of the disease.

The American Heart Association (AHA) has developed a program called My Life Check that incorporates “Life’s Simple 7”. According to the AHA, there are seven steps that any person can take to reduce their risk of heart disease. The steps are not expensive and “even modest improvements to your health will make a big difference”. The steps are about making lifestyle changes to improve your health.

The simple, seven-step list includes increasing physical activity, getting control of your blood cholesterol, eating better and reducing your blood pressure. Being active and eating better will help you achieve more steps such as losing weight and controlling

your blood sugar. The first step should be to stop using tobacco, the number one risk factor for heart disease.

For more information visit the Franklin County Health Department's website at www.fchd.org or go to the AHA's website, www.americanheart.org.