

## ESTABLISHMENT

The AMHC was established through Act 912 of 1991, initiated by lead sponsor (then) Sen. Bill Lewellen. It was the culmination of work begun through the leadership of Dr. Jocelyn Elders (director of the Arkansas Department of Health and state public health officer at the time) and the Arkansas Legislative Black Caucus. The act specified that the AMHC would:

- Studying issues relating to the delivery of and access to health services for minorities in Arkansas;
- Identify any gaps in the health service system that particularly affect minorities;
- Make Recommendations to relevant agencies and to the legislature for improving the delivery and access to health services for minorities; and
- Study and make recommendations as to whether adequate services are available to ensure future minority health needs will be met.

Two key pieces of state legislation were enacted in 2009. The first, Act 358, specifically charges AMHC with developing, implementing, maintaining and disseminating a comprehensive survey of racial and ethnic minority disparities in health and health care. The act specifies that the study be repeated every five years and that the commission will publish evidence-based data, define state goals and objectives, and develop pilot projects for decreasing disparities. The act also makes explicit an expectation that AMHC will, on or before October 1 each year, report to the governor and legislative leadership (including chairs of the House and Senate Committees on Public Health, Welfare and Labor), providing a summary of the commission's work over the year, a description of reductions in disparities, and an outline of the commission's planned work for the coming year.

In addition, Act 574 of 2009 modified the governance structure for the commission and expanded and clarified its duties. (See appendix for full versions of Acts 912, 358, and 574).

**AMHC works to assure that all Arkansans have equal access to quality health care, regardless of race or ethnicity and to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities in Arkansas.**