



NPA Blog
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Achieving Health Equity and Longevity for Men in Communities of Color
by **Bobie Williams**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), on average, the life expectancy is 76.5 years for white men, while it is only 71.8 years for black men. Hispanic men live longest with a life expectancy of 78.7 years. I have attended many funerals for men of color who died prematurely (before the age of 75), and wondered ‘How could they have lived longer?’

Studies such as the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) Risk Survey have found that disparities between the overall population and communities of color exist when indicators such as household income and levels of education are examined. These indicators act as determinants of health because they affect the conditions in which we live, work and play. Inadequacies in these conditions have negative impacts on health and health outcomes. Data shows that African American, Hispanic and American Indian households are more likely to experience and report poor health and less likely to use preventive services or seek out medical attention. I was aware of the link between inequities experienced by communities of color and health disparities and felt that there was an opportunity to provide appropriate public health interventions to raise awareness of health disparities for men in communities of color.

The outreach efforts in the Men’s Health Program in the Health Promotion, Education and Marketing division of the St. Louis Department of Health utilizes a collective impact approach to successfully conduct community outreach in the form of health fairs, screenings and lectures in St. Louis city and county. We have implemented partnerships with organizations such as American Heart Association; American Cancer Society and 100 Black Men of Metropolitan St. Louis. We also completed some of our programming with partners from St. Louis University and Washington University. Our health equity team addresses health disparities, increases health care access and promotes health equity through community partnerships. Through these partnerships, we are able to raise awareness of the need for men to have a primary care physician that they see regularly for preventive care. We also educate men about the importance of addressing current medical needs immediately.

At the City of St. Louis Department of Health, we identify health outcomes that disproportionately affect different subgroups of the St. Louis City population and work to address them. Alzheimer’s disease, diabetes, hypertension, and prostate cancer are examples of diseases that disproportionately impact men of color. We highlight them in Men's Health presentations that target audiences comprised mostly of minority males. For example, my staff visits one of our Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) twice per month to engage with men of color and discuss the conditions that affect them. Our visits to the FQHC allows doctors to easily hand-off patients to us for follow-up services that include referrals to community groups or organizations that can help address their obstacles to positive health outcomes. This helps build trust and rapport between the Department and people in the community.

The Men’s Health program has provided me with wonderful successes and lessons learned that are applicable to all backgrounds and neighborhoods:



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1. It helps to incorporate current efforts already in place. For example, our partner, 100 Black Men of America, Inc. was already engaged in an initiative to increase knowledge and health around prostate cancer, colorectal cancer, cardiovascular disease, depression and sickle cell disease. Why start from scratch when a foundation already exists? Build meaningful partnerships instead of making yourself a competitor.
2. Use educational handouts that resonate with the people you are trying to reach. Make sure the materials are culturally sensitive, clearly provide the required information and are linguistically appropriate.
3. Identify the right person to speak to the group to whom you are trying to appeal. You may have the right message, but the wrong person delivering it.
4. Lastly, be courteous and gracious when you are in someone else's neighborhood. No one wants to feel inferior or less knowledgeable. The goal is to improve the community's health, and not to point out what the community doesn't know.

How can you create partnerships in your community to work towards ending health disparities?

About the author:

Bobie Williams is a Program Manager I with the City of St. Louis Department of Health in St. Louis, MO. He holds both a Bachelor of Arts and Master of Science degree from Knox College and Western Illinois University respectively. His career in healthcare includes experience with sexually transmitted diseases/HIV/AIDS prevention, communicable diseases and other vital health related programs. In addition, Mr. Williams' passion for health-related issues has led him to serve as the co-chair to the Father's Initiative Committee, participate on several community boards and serve as member of the Heartland Regional Health Equity Council. For additional information, or to contact Mr. Williams, please email him at williamsb@stlouis-mo.gov.