

Learning from the African American Community

CONVERSATIONS ABOUT DIABETES PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT WITH THE TWIN CITIES AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES 2024

Black/African Americans have a rich history in Minnesota and have positively shaped many Minnesota communities and institutions. However, large disparities related to diabetes prevention and management are unfair, burden the entire African American community in unnecessary ways, and can lead to the sense that diabetes is a death sentence.

A different approach

Conversations between MDH and the Twin Cities African American communities were held as a part of understanding the experience of African Americans in Minnesota and the factors that contribute to disparities including discrimination, generational trauma, and poverty. Deeper understanding opens the door for addressing the challenge collaboratively with community to change practices, systems, and policies.

Conversation Goals

Sharing the African American community's experience related to diabetes including:

- a. Community strengths that can make a way forward
- b. Barriers to health that need to be eliminated

Building relationships with community through authentic conversation – listening and sharing back – and exploring potential actions.

With intentionality, more multi-generational dialogue, and open communication, we can keep building a stronger relationship and work towards the change we collectively desire.

Why conversations worked

- The community was ready
- Trusted messengers in community had strong connections to bring government and community together
- Meetings were held in a comfortable, trusted community space steeped in the history of the Twin Cities African American Community

What we talked about

Community assets to guide and shape planning and implementation

- Rich culture, traditions, and trusted community organizations that support health
- Healthful business, services, and programs that are owned by, led by, and serve the community
- Existing structures like religious community and deep friendships to support goal setting and provide encouragement

A web of barriers makes diabetes prevention and management difficult

- A fast-paced life that leaves little time for self-management and care
- Too few inviting green spaces and places for physical activity
- Few grocery stores in community and instead just easily available processed, less nutritious foods
- Education and advice that doesn't honor culture or see it as an asset to improve health
- Tight budgets that make it hard to prioritize health even if people have the information they need to care for themselves
- Not enough relevant, positive messaging about health
- Limited support for youth to build connections and have places to be active

To build toward a brighter future we need solutions that are created by and for community.

Solutions must be **multi-generational, community-centered, and community-focused**, not just focused on individuals. Solutions need to:

- Enhance plain language, positive health messages and education because knowledge is power
- Use community-building approaches to shape a healthier future
- Address policies and systems to build whole person health: it's bigger than just diabetes
- Income and economic opportunities
 - Social engagement and community connection
 - Shared spaces in community and transportation
 - Food and healthy food access
 - Access to culturally respectful health care

To build toward a brighter future we need to be in continued relationship and work together.

The learnings captured here represent the start of a conversation that needs to be ongoing. Initial steps taken to build this relationship further include:

- Developing and sharing this report together: community and MDH
- Inviting MDH to community events to share information and resources

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