



Changing Community Norms to Address Cardiovascular Disease

Public Health Problem

For African Americans living in Oregon, rates of cardiovascular disease deaths are alarmingly high, considering the small size of the population. Cardiovascular disease trends in Oregon parallel national trends, except that the black-white gap between rates of cardiovascular disease deaths is greater in Oregon than in the nation. In fact, Oregon's African Americans are 51% more likely to die of stroke than whites.

Program Example

To target the root causes of this black-white gap in cardiovascular disease and stroke, the African American Health Coalition developed a program that promotes physical activity and other heart-healthy behaviors among African Americans. The program "Lookin' Tight, Livin' Right" uses existing relationships between beauty shop and barbershop operators and their clients to assess readiness to change and promote healthy behaviors. In addition, "HOLLA!" is a project that trains high school students to educate their peers about cardiovascular disease and related risk factors. Another program uses educational mailings to low-income African Americans enrolled in Oregon's Medicaid program to raise their awareness and promote use of cardiovascular disease preventive services. Finally, the "Wellness Within REACH" program offers free physical activity classes to African Americans, helping reduce some of the barriers to healthy, active lifestyles.

Implications and Impact

For example, almost a third of people attending the "Wellness Within Reach" classes reported being told by a physician that they have high blood pressure, 21.8% reported being obese, and 14% reported having diabetes. Preliminary data show that 76% of participants in these exercise classes are now exercising more. These programs have become movements in the local community, changing the community's norm about physical activity and nutrition to the extent that community members have come together to raise funds to support and sustain these classes.

Contact Information

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