



A Snapshot of the African American Community Health Advisory Committee (AACHAC)

History

When statistics pointed out the alarming health disparities within their communities, San Mateo County residents devised a unique and creative solution: a community-based advocacy group that would work in partnership with one of the largest local health care organizations. The goal of this organization is to make information and services accessible in the community by maximizing available resources. Their work addresses health-related issues San Mateo County with special emphasis on reaching the underserved and disenfranchised where a disproportionate number of residents are afflicted with serious, life-threatening medical conditions such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, hypertension and diabetes.

Founded in 1995, the African American Community Health Advisory Committee [AACHAC] is an all volunteer committee that now boasts more than 40 members and community partners.

“The AACHAC has been a critical partner in helping Mills-Peninsula Health Services reach out to the Bay Area African American community. AACHAC has its roots in a community advisory committee formed to help us develop the Mills-Peninsula Breast Center in 1994. Member Gloria Brown asked for our support in improving health in this important community. We now measure success by the number of people whose lives have been saved through health screenings; as well as ever increasing mobilization within the faith-based community. We encourage other communities to implement this medical model by first finding enthusiastic leadership able to establish strategic alliances and challenge the status quo.”

Robert W. Merwin, former Chief Executive Officer, Mills-Peninsula Health Services

AACHAC began their communication effort in the faith-based community, known to be influential and trustworthy among targeted audiences. This innovative outreach has grown to a network of more than 20 churches where pastors, ministers and lay leaders have become strong and active health advocates.

“For the past five years we’ve held semi-annual health screening. We dedicate an entire Sunday to the work of AACHAC, canceling Sunday School to conduct blood pressure, cholesterol and glucose screenings. We have enough nurses in our congregation to conduct the screenings, and some members have been told to immediately call their doctors. From the church, to the doctor, to the hospital—lives have been saved, and we are a much healthier congregation.”

Rev. Dr. Larry Wayne Ellis, Pastor, Pilgrim Baptist Church

Today, the AACHAC has touched, influenced and saved the lives of tens of thousands of people through individual contact, workshops, health fairs, focus groups, public programs, seminars, the internet and its largest Signature Program—Soul Stroll for Health. More than 15 programs have been implemented targeting families, men, women, children and teens.

Signature Programs

Over the past 20 years, five programs have been created and implemented that serve as the core of our programmatic offering.

- Women's Health Initiative – Includes monthly mammogram screenings, the annual Women's Health Conference and the Breast Cancer Survivors' Quilt representing women who are, or were, once affected by breast cancer in some way.
- Men's Health Symposium – Includes an Annual Men's Health Symposium and prostate screening - Brothers Reaching Brothers.
- Soul Stroll for Health – A one-, three- or five- mile run or walk combined with a health fair with onsite health screenings and day-long activities for children and adults.
- Health Screenings – Working closely with the medical community, these screenings are held throughout the year at churches and a variety of other venues to make people aware of unrecognized health problems and encourage them to seek medical care as needed.
- Mental Health – A series of mini-sessions designed to increase awareness, dispel myths and discuss the truths of mental health with a focus on depression, grief, congregational care and issues affecting the elderly.

Supplemental Community Programs

As the AACHAC continues to engage with an ever increasing and diverse communities including Latinos and Pacific Islanders populations, we learn more about what residents need to continue on the path to better health. Five supplemental programs have been developed over the years to address these needs.

- Off to a Good Start – An annual physical activity and nutrition program held in January.
- Lectures – Informational forums focusing on issues in greater depth including oral health, kidney disease, dementia and Alzheimer's disease, lupus, HIV/AIDS and strokes.
- Health-related Programs for Youth – Engages youth in health related discussions leading to healthy youth development.
- Caregiver Annual Recognition Program – celebrate the dedicated family members who care loved ones. This annual program is held in conjunction with AACHAC's partnering congregations.

Donors

The AACHAC has benefited from and is grateful to our longstanding funding network represented by corporations, foundations, the government and individuals.

AACHAC goal to ensure access to health promotion services to the community has improved the Health System's ability to better serve the community. When we partner with AACHAC, it is with a confidence that they will go above and beyond to ensure a successful outcome. By providing services to all community members in underserved areas, AACHAC has greatly enhanced our health equity efforts in San Mateo County."

Edith Cabuslay, Program Manager, Community Health Promotion Unit

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