



**CENTER FOR MINORITY HEALTH,  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF PUBLIC HEALTH  
UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
PITTSBURGH, PA  
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**Executive Summary**

Acknowledging a lack of health education and access to medical care among local minority populations, specifically the African American community, the Center for Minority Health (CMH) set out to establish a multi-year campaign to disseminate important health information regarding diabetes and hypertension, two preventable diseases with common risk factors that impact a disproportionate number of African Americans.

In addition, CMH researchers also identified a lack of trust in the African American community toward physicians and medical care institutions. The program aims to mobilize trusted opinion leaders in the black community as agents for health promotion and disease prevention. Recognizing the historic role that barbershops and beauty salons play as a cultural institution, the CMH launched "Take a Health Care Professional to the People Day" as a strategy to bring public health and medical professionals into trusted settings in the black community. Local physicians, pharmacists, dentists, health educators, and nurses volunteered to spend time at nine participating barbershops and beauty salons. This annual event is designed provide health education and health screenings for diabetes and hypertension. For each of the past two years, CMH identified people who needed to be rushed to the hospital for treatment of hypertension that had previously gone undiagnosed and untreated.

Building upon the success of the program and seeing a necessity to reach people more than once each year, CMH has established the Lay Health Advisor training program designed for barbers and beauticians to become "first responders," trained in the use of CPR and the AED. In addition, their shops are turned into "portals" for dissemination of health information that is scientifically sound and culturally acceptable.

Organization Size: not applicable

**Program/Initiative Description**

Take A Health Professional to the People Day: The University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health's Center for Minority Health (CMH) observed that a growing number of the people in the local African American community were suffering from premature illness and death directly related to inadequate medical care, and many people did not have a primary care provider. The African American community also demonstrated a general lack of trust toward the medical community. Since far too many African Americans could not depend

upon information from physicians, they did share information within their social networks through word of mouth. Unfortunately, much of the information was not “evidence based,” and people who could benefit from health promotion and disease prevention did not know how to take control of their health. Recognizing the important and trusted role barbers and beauticians have historically played in the African American culture and community, CMH decided to partner with these businesses to increase the chances that accurate health information would be disseminated in these shops.

Beginning in 2001, the CMH recruited local health care workers and barbershops for the first annual “Take a Health Care Professional to the People Day.” Physicians and nurses volunteered at three local barbershops and spent the day educating the community on good health practices, specifically regarding diabetes and hypertension, two diseases that disproportionately affect African Americans.

The response was extremely positive, and the program has since been expanded. In 2002, six barbershops and three beauty salons participated. Although the program was becoming very successful, CMH recognized that one day per year was not enough. In response, they created a program to train barbers and beauticians as Lay Health Advisors. The training program takes place over six weeks and requires certification by the American Red Cross in CPR and use of the defibrillation device (AED). Following the six-week course, the participants are required to participate in monthly booster sessions. Certification through the program allows the barber or beautician to provide an additional service to their customers, supplying accurate information about diabetes and hypertension. The shops are also provided with focused health education literature specifically designed for African Americans. CMH is currently raising funds to equip certified barbershops and salons with computers linked to a wireless network for access to the internet. The high-speed computer access will be linked to the National Library of Medicine’s Consumer Information site, PubMed, which will allow individuals to complete a series of modules on over 100 medical conditions. The CMH partnership with the National Library of Medicine is one innovative example of how to disseminate health information directly to people at greatest risk for premature illness and death.

The program has also discovered a promising strategy to address the unconscious racial bias, described in the Institute of Medicine’s report “Unequal Treatment” (2000), that contributes to racial and ethnic health disparities. Most of the health care providers in the city are not African American, do not live in black neighborhoods, and may lack a cultural understanding of the social context that continues to shape the attitudes and behaviors of African Americans in need of health care. Barbershops and beauty salons are safe places for health care professionals to engage African Americans in natural settings outside of the clinical environment. CMH researchers hope this approach to community

outreach will increase the cultural competence of health care professionals and increase the trust essential for health promotion and disease prevention.

**Establishment of Program/Initiative:** September 2001

**Racial or Ethnic Health Disparities Problem the Program/Initiative Was Designed to Address:** Need for scientifically sound and culturally appropriate health information designed to increase awareness about pre-diabetes and pre-hypertension in the African American community in Greater Pittsburgh

### **Major Objectives**

- Eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities by the year 2010, with special focus on prevention and treatment of diabetes and hypertension
- Mobilize trusted institutions in the African American community to identify and train opinion leaders as lay health advisors responsible for provision of social support and dissemination of health communication messages
- Create opportunities for health professionals to engage the African American community in natural settings trusted by the people

### **Significant Results**

- Participation has increased from three barbershops in the first year to six barbershops and three beauty salons in the second year.
- Approximately 20 barbers and beauticians are involved in the training program to become lay health advisors.
- Media coverage and interest in the program has continued to increase with reports in *USA Today*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and on National Public Radio.
- Volunteer health care providers have shown an increased willingness to participate in the program.

### **External Partners in the Program/Initiative**

- Urban League of Pittsburgh
- Pittsburgh Theological Seminary
- National Library of Medicine
- Local foundations
- National Institutes of Health, National Center for Minority Health & Health Disparity

**Limitations or Problems Encountered:** Finding volunteer health care providers can be difficult.

**Estimated Cost of the Program, To Date:** \$ 10,000 to 50,000 per year

### **Advice to Other Organizations That May Want to Start a Similar Program**

- Visit the program in Pittsburgh and observe its processes and results first-hand

- Begin by identifying trusted institutions in your community and partner with them

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