

STATE & LOCAL

Issues at the state and community levels

Bronx diabetes program reaching residents with spiritual message

TONI CARTER describes her diabetes work with churches in the Bronx as a “calling.”

“I saw how using scripture could influence people to improve their health,” said Carter, RN, who lives in the south Bronx, a community in New York City’s northernmost borough. “Reading the scripture and standing on the word of God makes you accountable. God has given us these bodies, these lives and we are obligated to take care of them.”

Carter is a peer educator with a faith-based health promotion program designed to empower residents with the knowledge and tools needed to better manage their diabetes. Led by Bronx Health Reach, a project of the Institute for Family Health that works to eliminate health disparities in southwest Bronx, the program was specially tailored to engage congregants at nearly 50 Bronx churches. The program, known as *The Way: A Faith-Based Diabetes Conversation*, completed its pilot phase last year and organizers are now working to expand its reach.

The Bronx is home to New York City’s highest diabetes rate. In southwest Bronx, 16 percent of residents have been diagnosed with diabetes. In all of New York City, the diabetes diagnosis rate is only 9 percent, according to APHA member Carlos Devia, MA, program manager for research and evaluation at Bronx Health Reach.

“We’ve had a really big success in improving clinical outcomes that even we didn’t think we’d be able to accomplish,” Devia said.

Bronx Health Reach has been working with local

churches for more than a decade, oftentimes focusing on diabetes prevention. But it didn’t have a structured curriculum to help congregants better manage the disease. To fill the gap, Devia and his colleagues worked with educators at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine to adapt an already developed curriculum known as *Los Caminos*, a diabetes program aimed at Hispanic residents.

Los Caminos

had been offered in community centers, which presented a problem for recruitment. So in addition to infusing the curriculum with scripture and changing its name, Bronx Health Reach decided to meet its audience where they already go: church.

“It’s all about going where people are,” Devia told *The Nation’s Health*. “Many programs offer this kind of information, but it’s hard to get people’s attention. The advantage in a faith-based setting is that you already have a captive audience.”

To get the ball rolling, Bronx Health Reach trained a handful of nurses from

churches it already partnered with to be peer educators. The nurses, who also worked to infuse spiritual values, scripture and prayer into the curriculum, recruited pilot participants and led weekly meetings over a three-month period at a church in southwest Bronx. The participants, the majority of whom were older than 45 and all of whom were black, learned a variety of self-management techniques, such as setting health goals, good nutrition, dealing with the stress of diabetes and how to better communicate with their doctors.

And the effort is working. Devia reported that the initial 18 participants are reporting better medication adherence, lower blood pressure and improved blood sugar levels. Participants are also becoming advocates for their own health. Devia told the story of a participant who, upon hearing that other group members had their eyes and feet checked for diabetes-related complications, demanded his doctor do the same.

APHA member Charmaine Ruddock, MS, project director at Bronx Health Reach, said framing the curriculum in a spiritual context was key.

“What we’ve learned over 10 years of working with a faith-based initiative is that if you don’t embed spiritual values in these health-oriented programs, you’ll miss the boat,” Ruddock said. “Now, we’ve built a real reputation of being faith-based instead of faith-placed.”

For more information, visit www.bronxhealthreach.org. ■

— Kim Krisberg

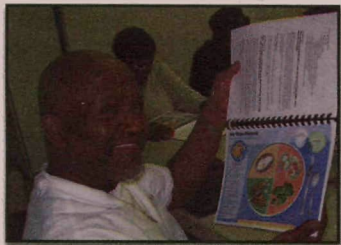


Photo courtesy Bronx Health Reach

A program participant shows off the nutrition component of *The Way in summer 2011*.



Photo courtesy Bronx Health Reach

Participants in *The Way*, a faith-based diabetes self-management program created by Bronx Health Reach, gather in summer 2011 at Agape Love Christian Center in the Bronx.

STATES IN BRIEF

Videos help shoppers navigate grocery store

Traveling aisle by aisle in a grocery store and providing shopping tips such as how to choose healthy beverages and whole-grain bread while avoiding fat-laden snacks, a video series by the North Carolina Eat Smart, Move More campaign gives helpful advice accompanied by printable, pocket-sized shopping tips.

The 12-part video series covers each aisle in a typical grocery store. For example, in the “Choosing Healthy Beverages” video, water is touted as the best choice, and shoppers are advised to skip sugar-sweetened sports drinks and to aim for 100 percent juice if choosing juices.

The “Managing the Cookie Aisle” video includes tips on avoiding the aisle when possible, looking for 100-calorie packs and comparing food labels to find cookies with the least number of calories and no trans fat.

Eat Smart, Move More is guided by the state’s plan to prevent overweight, obesity and related chronic diseases. Partners in the effort include the state health department and also groups such as the Arthritis Foundation, Inter-Faith Food Shuttle, Verizon Wireless and North Carolina Farm Bureau Federation.

The grocery store tips cover healthy choices such as fruit packed in water, low-sodium or no-salt-added canned vegetables and cereals with at least three grams of fiber but no more than 200 calories per serving. Other online resources that are part of the campaign include recipes, success stories about how people have improved their eating and exercise habits and a quiz on healthy choices.

To access the videos and learn more about Eat Smart, Move More, visit www.eatsmartmovemore.nc.com.

Female condoms help prevent HIV spread

The D.C. Female Condom Program, a public-private partnership to provide and promote female condoms, prevented enough HIV infections in the first year alone to save more than \$8 million in future medical care costs, a recent study found.

Conducted by researchers at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the study found a cost savings of nearly \$20 for every dollar spent on the program. The program distributed more than 200,000 female condoms in areas of the city with disproportionately high HIV rates among women.

“These results clearly indicate that delivery of, and education about,

female condoms is an effective HIV prevention intervention and an outstanding public health investment,” said David Holtgrave, PhD, professor and

chair of the Department of Health Behavior and Society at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

Black women account for roughly 57 percent of new HIV infections among all American women and 90 percent of all new HIV infections in Washington, D.C. Gregory Pappas, MD, PhD, senior deputy director of the D.C. Department of Health’s HIV/AIDS STD Administration, said the study findings are encouraging.

“It is critical that we empower women, especially those at greatest risk, to take control by increasing awareness of the female condom and providing both education and access to this highly effective and affordable option that empowers women to protect themselves,” said Pappas, an APHA member.

The study was published online April 10 in *AIDS and Behavior*. ■

— Donya Currie



Photo courtesy Catherine Yeulet, iStockphoto

A North Carolina program uses videos to encourage healthy choices at the grocery store.

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