



(Arizona)

Project Title: *Black AIDS Taskforce*

Contacts:

RJ Shannon

Minority AIDS Coordinator
Arizona Department of Health
Services
Office of HIV/AIDS
150 North 18th Avenue, Ste 110
Phoenix, AZ 85007
Phone: (602) 364-3610
Fax: (602) 364-3268
shannor@azdhs.gov

Description

Originally developed by health department staff and community members, the Arizona Black AIDS Task Force is a coalition of community partners that are dedicated to increasing HIV/AIDS awareness, promoting prevention efforts and education on healthy living and linking positive individuals with services in our state.

Objectives

- Provide a space for a community driven network of partners invested in HIV prevention and care issues within the black community to engage and share resources,
- Raise awareness and provide HIV-related education and trainings to members of the black community and staff that service the black community,
- Increase advocacy within the black community on HIV prevention, and care and treatments.

Partners

The Black AIDS Taskforce incorporates members from health department staff, legislators, public health workers, academicians, community based organization staff, community members, and faith based representatives. Meetings are open to the public, and usually include members of various racial and ethnic backgrounds working with the black community.

Background

The taskforce grew after community members approached health department staff hoping to brainstorm strategies to educate the black community on HIV, promote advocacy, and generally increase HIV-related awareness. At the time, various coalitions and community groups were providing services and developing strategies to best serve Arizona's black population with regards to HIV; however, no unifying state-wide body existed. The taskforce was established in order to provide an organized group of community partners from across the state who are interested in the preventing the spread of HIV in the black community.

Approach

The Black AIDS Taskforce is a grassroots coalition of members that meet bi-monthly to share information and brainstorm strategies to best serve the black community. The structure of the taskforce includes a chairperson, and various co-chair that represent different committees. The committees include education, policy, and population specific groups. Additionally, all members represent a different target group in the black community, and include transgendered, MSM, and IDU community, to name a few. The health department participates as an active member of the taskforce. Community representation is a key element to the success of the Black AIDS Taskforce and reinforces a familial approach to fighting the spread of the virus in the black community.

During the monthly meetings participants give short introductions on who they are and what organization or group they represent. Following the introduction individuals share information on upcoming events taking place, and also significant milestones in their personal lives. Personal testimonials are a common occurrence at taskforce meetings, and reinforce the fact that the meeting is a safe space for dialogue. Education is a major component in the overall goal of the taskforce. During each meeting 20 minutes is set aside to educate the participants on a given topic. Topic-specific experts address a range of issues, representing different organizations and groups within the

state. There is also an opportunity for individuals to present on current programs and strategies targeting the black community, and solicit advice on the topic. The remainder of the meeting is devoted to reports from the various committees. Committees also meet after they present their updates and discuss upcoming committee activities. Taskforce committees host and participate in different events around the state, which include health fairs, school talks, and national HIV/AIDS holiday. The Black AIDS Taskforce is committed to raising awareness by staying visible and present at various statewide events. Donated food is provided at the close of the meeting and assists in the sustainability of the taskforce.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The politically conservative culture of the state and geography of Arizona were identified as two of the greatest challenges faced by the Black AIDS Taskforce. The taskforce managed to address the conservative culture of Arizona by engaging individuals and groups that may oppose their work. Their growing relationships with the faith community and local legislators were possible through grassroots advocacy. Individual members reached out to policy-makers and faith based leaders to discuss the state of the epidemic and the work of the taskforce. The team found it very important to make sure that everyone was at the table and engaging in fruitful dialogue.

Tucson and Phoenix are the most populated cities in the state, and represent the areas with the largest concentration of blacks. The team struggles with finding new ways to make sure that voices from the rural communities are present and heard. Taskforce members are committed to assisting rural cities, and show their support by travelling to events in rural areas. Members use their own transportation to visit both rural and urban events. Monthly meetings take place in Phoenix, and require members to travel to participate. The team is currently exploring the best way to incorporate conference calls into the meetings to accommodate members outside of Phoenix.

Unable to secure federal or state funds from the health department to support the Black AIDS Taskforce, the taskforce focuses on keeping overall costs to a minimum and rely on donated resources. Meetings take place at a local church or other venues that support the taskforce, and offer a free meetings space. Food is provided at every meeting and assists with the sustainability of the initiative. For food the taskforce relies on members or restaurants to donate food. Also, the team took an innovative approach and asked members to donate unused or unwanted gift cards in order to secure food and other

necessary resources. As a member of the taskforce, the health department provides the group with hard resources such as condoms, brochures, and other relevant materials. Additionally, the taskforce managed to secure grant funding to cover meeting and community outreach costs.

The Way Forward

In the future that taskforce hopes to continue to engage new traditional and nontraditional partners. Currently the American Indian AIDS Taskforce and the Black AIDS Taskforce are the two oldest groups in the state. Both groups are working to connect with the newly formed Latino AIDS Taskforce to strengthen strategies targeting specific populations and share information. Additionally, the taskforce is working to build relationships with both the youth and the medical communities, which are two areas not strongly represented in the group. With regards to programming, the taskforce is preparing to conduct both a social marketing training with the help of My Brother's Keeper, and a HIV/AIDS leadership training.

Overall, the Black AIDS Taskforce envisions an Arizona with no new HIV/AIDS cases in the black community and with the best possible life for the HIV positive community members.

Resources

Available upon request.