



Minnesota

Project Title: *The Minnesota African/African American Women HIV Initiative (MAAAH)*

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Description

An initiative established to provide education and awareness on issues concerning the impact of HIV/AIDS on African and African American women in Minnesota.

Objectives

- Implement multifaceted approaches and action that positively engage the community and legislators regarding health initiatives and policies focusing on black women.
- Research and compile culturally competent educational materials for medical providers focusing on care & treatment adherence for black women.
- Expand participation and collaboration with organizations, agencies and coalitions which advocate for improving the health of women.
- Increase HIV/AIDS prevention messages and the awareness of its impact on our community.

Partners

The major partners in this initiative include Minnesota Department of Health staff, HIV consumers and representatives from African American AIDS Task Force (AAATF), Office of Minority and Multicultural

Health staff, and leaders from the community based organization Turning Points. More recently the MAAAH partnership grew to include representatives from local universities. These partners make up the MAAAH leadership team.

Background

In 2007, a small team consisting of Minnesota Department of Health staff, community based organization partners, and black HIV positive female consumers participated in NASTAD's first annual regional forum entitled *African American Women and HIV/AIDS: Confronting the Crisis and Planning for Action*. During the regional forum, teams brainstormed possible initiatives targeting black women for their jurisdiction. The MAAAH initiative grew out of this initial conversation, and widened the scope from specifically black women to include all women of African descent in order to best serve the women in their jurisdiction.

Approach

Originally discussed in 2007, the MAAAH initiative came to life in 2008. Using various social marketing strategies the team set out to raise awareness on how HIV/AIDS was affecting women of African descent in their jurisdiction. The leadership team solicited the support of champions from local media outlets to inform the public. A brochure, factsheet, and website were created to raise awareness and update the community on the state of the epidemic. Data relevant to the MAAAH initiative stem from 2008 health department document that highlights the impact of HIV on women of African descent in the state. The website provides information on upcoming MAAAH events, and relevant resources addressing the state of the virus both in Minnesota and nationwide.

Overtime the initiative, and it's partners grew, and monthly meetings were established to help the group organize. The leadership team meets the week before the monthly general body meeting. The meetings provide a space for people to meet, discuss, and organize events that focus on protecting against the spread of HIV amongst women of African descent in the Minnesota area. It is also an opportunity to share strategies that raise awareness on HIV, and distribute MAAAH materials. The team host events on the internationally and nationally recognized HIV/AIDS days along with other community level events. Recently, during World AIDS Day 2010, members of the MAAAH initiative hosted an open mic night where male and female community members shared poems and music related HIV/AIDS. The leadership team also organized a roundtable

discussion to address the affects of HIV/AIDS amongst women of African descent.

Lastly, the MAAAH initiative is also concerned with raising awareness of policy-makers on issues surrounding women of African descent and HIV; therefore, team leaders engage political leaders by inviting them to relevant events and meetings.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Overall participation on behalf of members of both the African and African American communities continues to be a challenge for the MAAAH initiative. Particularly with the African population, soliciting partnerships from agencies serving specific African communities did not prove to be entirely effective. In order to overcome this obstacle MAAAH leaders relied on recruiting support from a few influential community members. These individuals are responsible for taking information regarding upcoming MAAAH meetings and events back to their respective communities. The utilization of influential community members, or community champions, presented an effective way to increase participation amongst women of African descent.

Funding presents an additional challenge to the MAAAH initiative. In order to offset costs, Turning Points donated space for monthly meetings. Materials are developed and printed through a collaborative effort between the Department of Health and Human Services and the Turning Points office.

The Way Forward

Moving forward the MAAAH initiative plans to continue to engage policy makers, and join other agencies to advocate for improvement in the health of women of African descent. Community engagement will remain an area of focus through monthly meetings and events. In August they plan to hold elections to transition leadership and keep the momentum going. Additionally the team is looking to utilize social networking websites, such as Facebook, to expand the number of women they can reach. The MAAAH team understands that HIV prevention is an issue everyday for every woman of color. With this in mind, they hope to continue to have more events to raise awareness.

Resources

Available at www.mnmaaah.webs.com.