

# Improving Cancer Outcomes for African Americans

The purpose of **Improving Cancer Outcomes for African Americans in Michigan (ICOOA)** is to reduce the unequal burden of cancer and improve the quality of life of African Americans in Michigan. This initiative was based on a community engagement model in which African American community representatives from across socio-economic strata were organized to provide leadership in developing methods to best engage members of their communities to address the issues of cancer. The concept was to form Design Teams in each of the five selected communities to plan and implement activities to engage the larger community to assist in accomplishing the goals of the project through a statewide initiative.

In May of 2002, the first steps were taken by engaging two to three representatives from each of the five communities (Detroit, Flint, Lansing, Pontiac, and Saginaw) to review an initial concept. Once there was buy-in from these representatives, additional representatives were added to develop the Design Team and the project. Together, the teams further developed the overall project goals to:

- 1) increase awareness about cancer in the African American community;
- 2) increase knowledge about cancer;
- 3) increase communication about cancer; and
- 4) decrease myths about cancer and increase screening and utilization of cancer screening programs.

Each community then began to develop a work plan, which included at least two interventions. By the beginning of 2004, [Faith Access to Community Economic Development](#), the coordinating agency for this project, hired Community Liaisons to assist Detroit, Flint, Lansing, and Saginaw in continuing the development, facilitation and implementation of the interventions. The interventions developed in each community had two thrusts: One focused on addressing a specific segment of the African American community, and the other included a community-wide intervention, addressing the broader community to promote awareness and involvement.

Currently, Design Teams have been organized in Detroit, Flint, Lansing, and Saginaw, with a total of 63 Design Team members; most members are African American and live within the community they represent. Due to extenuating circumstances, development of the Pontiac Team was delayed until phase 2 of the initiative. During 2004, four focused interventions and four community-wide interventions occurred.

**The Detroit Design Team** developed a Parish Nurse Community Cancer Education Outreach as their focused intervention to support parish nurses in collectively addressing cancer in the African American community. This resulted in the development of an outreach leader toolkit and training of 15 parish nurses. The Detroit Design Team held a town hall meeting for their community-wide intervention and participated in three other town hall meetings that resulted in educating over 100 Detroit residents.

As the project evolved, this concept was expanded to include the Community Cancer Advocates initiative, which engages and trains individuals who are not nurses to provide cancer awareness and prevention education. Additional training sessions were organized to include information

focusing specifically on Breast and Cervical Cancer as well as Colorectal Cancer. Presentations are made at various churches and community sites.

**The Flint Design Team's** focused intervention was the Faith Based Leadership Series, which provided training sessions to support faith community leaders in collectively addressing cancer in the African American community. Twenty pastors and health team members were trained and there was interest in training from additional pastors and health team members. For their community-wide intervention, the Flint Design team developed a citywide Family Reunion BBQ to mobilize and engage the African American community in addressing the issue of cancer. The days events included 13 health education related vendors, physicians and survivors as guest speakers, free screenings for blood pressure, PSAs on skin cancer, a cancer survivors fashion show, four local food vendors, and live entertainment. Over 300 residents of Flint and Genesee County participated. Flint continues to link with community partners, particularly the 66 Faith Based Health Team Network members, to promote cancer education and awareness to increase participation in screening via existing screening programs and healthcare providers.

**The Saginaw Design Team** developed a County Wide Essay Contest for 4th and 5th grade students from Saginaw and Buena Vista Township schools. The intervention was designed as a method to engage families in addressing project goals. The result of the focused intervention was a curriculum modified to promote cancer awareness for grades K-6. Cancer awareness sessions were facilitated to 441 4th and 5th grades students; 132 students participated in the essay contest. Students completed a pre- and post- evaluation to capture change in knowledge. Parents and children reported engaging in conversations regarding cancer. The principals and teacher requested that their students participate in the 2005 essay contest. The Saginaw Design Team engaged the broader community by partnering with Greater Coleman Temple Church of God in Christ to coordinate an African American Expo. The ICOAA hosted workshops and a panel discussion that addressed the cancer burden in the African American community. The expo had 17 vendors, a panel discussion ("A Faith Look at the Politics of Health Care") with panelists Dr. Claude Young, President of Southern Christian Leadership Conference (moderator); Dr. Kimberlydawn Wisdom, Michigan Surgeon General; Representative Carl Williams, Michigan House of Representatives; Dr. Eugene Seals, family practice; and Louis Hawking, HealthPlus of Michigan. There was recruitment for the Breast and Cervical Cancer Control Program, and several health workshops. Walt "Baby" Love, a national syndicated radio announcer and kidney cancer survivor, was also a featured guest speaker. The expo also provided the Design Team with a venue for promoting the results of the essay contest.

**The Lansing Design Team** partnered with the American Cancer Society, also represented on the team, on the two interventions. This was an effort to increase participation of African Americans in projects already taking place in the community. Reviewing the history of low attendance of African Americans in these projects, the past year would be used as a baseline to determine project effectiveness. The design teams focused intervention was Let's SCREEN (Seek ColoRectal Exams Everyone Needs). This is a modified version of the American Cancer Society's Tell-A-Friend program to address colorectal cancer in the African American community. In March 2004, team members were trained by the American Cancer Society to talk with community groups about colorectal cancer and the importance of colorectal cancer screenings. The community members were encouraged to get screened and call five of their

friends or relatives over 40 and encourage them to be screened. During April – September 2004, each person making calls completed a log of their calls and provided the design team with names, demographics and contact information for follow-up in three months to see how many were actually screened.

The Lansing Design Team Community Wide intervention was “Straight Talk About Cancer: What Every African American Must Know.” This is a health forum that focuses on breast, colon and prostate cancers. Most recently, the Design Team established the goal to reach African American community leaders who can spread the message to their constituencies. To aid in the process, a training session for community leaders was conducted, in partnership with the American Cancer Society, in September 2004.

The Pontiac Design is currently working to implement Cancer Awareness Sunday. This will provide education and information to churches within the Pontiac community.

For more information, please contact E. Yvonne Lewis, director, or Paulette Johnson, project specialist, at (810) 232-7733.