

*“The REACH Boston Elders 2010 project had a great impact on my life, especially being a diabetic who had been noncompliant. Regarding racial disparities in the black community, I have seen the facts come to life before my eyes. I have been more observant of my health care providers and how patients have been treated, including myself.”*

—REACH program participant

## REACHing Black Older Adults in Boston, Massachusetts

### Who We Are

The Boston Public Health Commission coordinates the REACH Boston Elders 2010 project.

- This project works to eliminate health disparities in diabetes and heart disease among black older adults in Boston.
- This project provides opportunities for black older adults to actively lead, plan, and develop a citywide model to improve health outcomes and raise awareness of the problems faced by the black older adult population.
- As part of a community approach, a coalition was formed to develop a community action plan. This coalition includes community elders, health care providers, educators, researchers, and representatives of local government agencies.

### The Problem

- In Massachusetts, the estimated prevalence of diabetes among non-Hispanic blacks is 9.9%, compared with 6.0% among non-Hispanic whites.

- Massachusetts adults aged 75 years or older are more than twice as likely to have diabetes as those aged 45–64.
- Heart disease is the leading cause of death in Massachusetts. Blacks are at the greatest risk for health problems related to overweight and obesity, which are major risk factors for heart disease.

### The Solution

- To address these problems, the REACH Boston Elders 2010 project uses an approach that includes community mobilization, education, and training to eliminate the unequal burden of disease and social inequities in the health care system.
- An education and training model teaches health care providers and

community members how to properly care for older adults, especially those with diabetes and heart disease.

- The REACH Boston Elders 2010 project uses seminars, health fairs, walk-a-thons, and intensive health training sessions to reinforce and support the adoption of healthy lifestyles and to help connect older adults with needed services.
- The coalition also offers classes and workshops on topics important to older adults, such as nutrition, self-management of chronic diseases, and safe exercises such as tai chi.

### Our Achievements

- In 2006, the REACH Boston Elders 2010 project reached more than 2,000 black older adults through 49 health education workshops, presentations, and events. These activities focused on issues such as physical activity, nutrition, heart disease, diabetes, health disparities, advocacy, medications, and Medicare/Medicaid.
- When surveyed, 86% of respondents said they had learned something new at these events, and 60% said they would change their behavior.

Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) is a community-based public health program funded by CDC to eliminate racial and ethnic health disparities.

[www.cdc.gov/reach](http://www.cdc.gov/reach)





## Mobilizing Community Resources

Boston Public Health Commission; Action for Boston Community Development; Commission on Affairs of the Elderly; Center for Community Health Education Research and Service; Jubilee Christian Church; American Diabetes Association, Boston Chapter; American Heart Association, Boston Chapter; Central Boston Elder Services; 60 Plus Veterans; The Goldenaires of Freedom House.

### Our Achievements, cont.

- When surveyed, 90% of people who attended the coalition's monthly meeting said they had made changes in their lifestyle as a result of attending these meetings.
- In 2007, our coalition received the Community Leaders Award from Health Care for All, a nationally recognized health care, policy, and advocacy group.

### Our Future

The REACH Boston Elders 2010 project will continue to highlight the concerns of black older adults in Boston, and we will incorporate an intergenerational approach to reducing health disparities in Boston.

Our coalition will continue to address topics and activities related to diabetes and heart disease prevention, the need for equal access to care, and other social determinants of health. Coalition members and partners will continue to support black older adults in Boston and lead the way

in developing a solid community-based model to improve health and health care access for blacks in Boston and beyond.

### Getting the Word Out Locally

- "Health Care Disparities Among the Races: REACH Boston Elders 2010," *National Public Radio/WBUR Boston*, September 28, 2005.
- "Pair Keep Eye on Health of Hub's Minority Elders," *Boston Herald*, December 3, 2004.

### Generating New and Exciting Science

- "REACHing Beyond Expectations: Black, Elderly, and Fighting for Health, Justice and Equality." Presented at the 10th Anniversary Conference of the Community-Campus Partnerships for Health, Toronto, Canada, April 11–14, 2007.
- "REACH Boston Elders 2010: Moving a Community and Changing the Business as Usual." Presented at the 5th New England Regional Minority Health

Conference, Mashantucket, Connecticut, April 3, 2007.

### Keys to Lasting Change in the Black Older Adult Community

Community commitment and active participation by black older adults, along with various stakeholders and key state and local policy makers, have increased the visibility and knowledge of public health problems affecting black older adults in Boston. Our coalition's ability to effectively address the high rates of diabetes, heart disease, and their related risk factors and complications among local residents has demonstrated the strength of community organizing.

We have found that health disparities can be addressed through ongoing education, long-term partnerships, and a commitment to change. We have made significant strides in improving the health of black older adults in Boston.

## REACH FOR MORE INFORMATION



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