

Why do we need a Black Health Strategy?

Health disparities among ethnic populations is well established which includes evidence that people of African descent are experiencing a disproportionate burden of the impact of many chronic and disabling diseases such as diabetes and its complications, hypertension, heart disease and stroke, HIV and AIDS, certain types of cancer, certain sexually transmitted diseases, mental health, sickle cell disease, childhood obesity and others.

There are many reasons and theories for the disparities. Genetics, lifestyle, and culture play a role. Income and poverty, education and literacy, violence and safe environments, access to appropriate health and social services, stress, oppression and racism also play a role.

The absence of well-being does not occur in a vacuum. The forces that create the conditions for the experience of ill-health are internal and external, cultural and systemic. Lessening the impact and thereby improving the health and well-being of members of the diverse Black community will not only improve their lives but will be of great benefit to the larger society. Such an endeavour will require a well-developed, comprehensive strategy that addresses the many facets of what it means to be well and the conditions that foster it.

We need a Black Health Strategy because without it there is absolutely no reason to believe or expect that members of the Black community will enjoy a significantly greater experience of health and well-being tomorrow than they do today.

The Black Health Project

The Black Health Project (BHP) in essence is the seed or stepping stone of a larger Black Health Strategy (to be developed) that will:

- Increase awareness and education within the Black community of chronic disease and promotion of healthy lifestyles
- Drive ethnospecific, community-based and system-based data collection and health research in the Black community
- Influence public health policy, its development, implementation and evaluation and
- Build strong, effective partnerships among stakeholders

There are three main components to the project:

1. The Black Pulse Report which will address awareness of chronic disease, health seeking behaviours, and readiness for change within the diverse Black community.
2. The Black Health Challenge and Beat D'Island Rhythm 5 Mile Run/Walk which is 12 week healthy lifestyle intervention program and a community organization fundraiser and;
3. The Black Health & Wellness Expos – a series of connected health awareness and health promotion forums; and the State of Health of Black Canadians (Ontario) Conference – a gathering of stakeholders (community members, health professionals and service providers, and health government agencies) to begin to lay the ground work of developing the Black Health Strategy.

The components of the Black Health Project are interdependent and will culminate in the Black Health Report, a summary of the process, partners, events, outcomes and recommendations. Future components to be added to the project include the Community Based Research Summit and the Public Health Policy Summit.

The lead community organizations of the BHP are the Black Health Alliance and TAIBU Community Health Centre. Both organizations have a specific mandate to address health related issues impacting the Black community.

Since January 2010 a number of community organization presentations of the BHP have taken place and in addition to strong support from BHA members and member organizations, several community organizations and community members have expressed interest in joining the effort and becoming a partner. In addition, a number of charities are committed to providing financial and development support for the project.

This project is very important for the community and we are seeking the support and partnership of interested organizations, agencies and individuals. A greater tomorrow is directly dependent on the work we do today.

“Coming together is a beginning;

keeping together is progress;

working together is success.” Henry Ford.

Peace & Unity

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