

Lifelines

from the National Cancer Institute



Community-based Program Has African American Communities Working Alongside the National Cancer Institute on Addressing Disparities

By the National Cancer Institute

Deep in the heart of the South, a cadre of researchers at the University of Alabama-Birmingham is taking a personal approach to investigating cancer. While work continues to go on in traditional laboratory settings where cells and microbes are studied on slides under the intense light of microscopes, the fight against cancer also involves communicating with and listening to people. That means talking with local African American residents about the disease and its impact on their lives to determine education and awareness gaps. It's also about sharing cancer knowledge with the community, relying on the communications channels that people know and trust, and identifying resources people can turn to for help and information, all in a culturally appropriate way.

When it comes to researching and confronting cancer, all populations are different. There are different factors that influence the course and outcome of the disease, different cancer burdens, and even different ways of dealing with a cancer diagnosis due to cultural norms and a person's background. This is where the National Cancer Institute's Community Networks Program (CNP) comes into play. NCI is supporting an array of community-based cancer control programs that focus on cancer disparities in communities serving African American and other racial/ethnic and underserved populations. The University of Alabama-Birmingham program, called the Deep South Network, is one of the CNP initiatives that work to improve cancer outcomes within the African American community. It serves the Mississippi delta and the Alabama black belt.

The key to success in the CNP is Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR). CBPR is a research approach that mandates a partnership between traditionally trained "experts" and members of a community, with all parties addressing a common research problem. This approach requires the community to be a full research partner, participating in planning, developing, implementing, evaluating, and disseminating the research. Community members are actively engaged with the local research team and the federal partners in cancer education, training, and research initiatives within community boundaries. In 2005, the NCI created CNP by investing \$95 million in five-year grants to various cancer research institutions located in 25

communities. The mission is to develop participatory education, training, and research programs.

Some typical CNP services that help African Americans confront cancer include:

- Providing transportation to people in Greene and Sumter counties in Alabama, who have to travel at least 30 miles to see a doctor;
- Promoting a healthier lifestyle through a neighborhood Walk Campaign;
- Utilizing the services of the CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program (NBCCEDP), which provides access to critical breast and cervical cancer screening services for underserved women in the United States.
- Recruiting local churches to participate in NCI's Body & Soul program to encourage the intake of fresh fruits and vegetables;
- Counseling individuals through "There is Hope"; and
- Preparing for life after cancer.

The Deep South Network is reaching far and wide, cutting a broad swath through 22 counties in Alabama and Mississippi, with the help of 550 well trained community workers and 460 others from various groups in the community. Other cancer control outreach programs that focus on the African American population are based in South Carolina, Michigan, North Carolina, Georgia, Arkansas, Maryland, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Florida, Massachusetts, and Missouri.

You may live in or near one of these CNPs and be completely unaware of the services and resources that may be available to you. While some CNP sites work with African American communities, the 25 programs nationwide benefit other underserved racial groups, such as Native American, Native Alaskan, Asian, and Pacific Islander, as well as groups classified by ethnicity, such as Hispanic/Latino.

The cultural aspects of the CNP cannot be overestimated. A key understanding of social and cultural norms is important to the work that goes on every day. For example, through understanding of the importance of the black church in America, especially in the South, the Deep South Network was able to successfully find a way to bring health issues into the structure of African American churches. You can learn more about the Deep South Network and the CNP on the World Wide Web at the following sites:

<http://crchd.cancer.gov/cnp/pi-partridge-description.html>

<http://crchd.cancer.gov/cnp/overview.html>

Also, the Cancer Information Service is just a phone call away, 1-800-4-CANCER. Calling that number will connect you with a specialist who can advise you or recommend resources to learn more about cancer.

NCI leads the National Cancer Program and the NIH effort to dramatically reduce the burden of cancer and improve the lives of cancer patients and their families, through research into prevention and cancer biology, the development of new interventions, and the training and mentoring of new researchers. For more information about cancer, please visit the NCI Web site at www.cancer.gov or call NCI's Cancer Information Service at 1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237).