

FAITH AND PUBLIC HEALTH COLLABORATION

WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

To ensure an effective and comprehensive approach to the vast range of public health challenges, it is paramount that the public health community works collaboratively with faith-based organizations to build supportive partnerships. People's attitudes, health beliefs, lifestyle choices, and their environment are among the many factors that influence today's health problems. These factors are in turn often influenced by faith-based organizations and the services and support they provide to individuals, families, and communities. Faith-based organizations play an important role in the lives of many citizens and, as such, are natural partners for public health collaboration. To more completely address important public health issues, it is essential that public health reach out to faith-based organizations.

WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

CDC has a rich and expanding history of partnerships with faith-based organizations. These partnerships have supported efforts to combat specific diseases like HIV and cancer as well as in broader health-related areas such as safe, affordable childcare, drug-free settings for youth, and family-friendly support systems. Faith-based partnerships have also been effective in addressing other community-wide concerns and health issues.

Examples of Program in Action

- Heart, Body, and Soul began as a coalition of 230 places of worship in East Baltimore. Together they saw the need to improve the health of their community and increase health resources available to the larger community. Based on this need, they trained 29 lay community health workers with help from their public health partner. The community health workers organized hundreds of volunteers in places of worship to provide health screenings and implement programs that addressed smoking cessation and other health concerns. This model has been replicated by others to reach more than 55,000 people with health promotion, smoking cessation, and other related services.
- "Health-e-AME" is a physical activity initiative aimed at increasing exercise among African Americans in South Carolina. Over 600 churches across the state participate in this initiative. Plans for the program were created with African Methodist Episcopal church members and include education about exercise, social support, Praise Aerobics (moving to gospel music), and walking clubs.

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

CDC will continue to build a network of leaders in public health and faith organizations who can advise on the design, implementation, and evaluation of partnerships between public health programs and faith-based organizations. To support the continued development of this network, CDC has partnered with Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health's Interfaith Health Program to provide national and regional Institutes for Public Health and Faith Collaborations. These institutes are preparing leaders in faith-based and public health organizations to increase their effectiveness in working together to improve community health.