



Addressing High Infant Mortality Rates Among African Americans

Although infant mortality rates have fallen over time, wide disparities persist between racial and ethnic groups. In 2006, the rate for African Americans was more than twice the rate for non-Hispanic whites, Hispanics, and Asians. In Genesee County, Michigan, where Flint is the largest city with a population of 124,943, the infant mortality rate among African Americans is nearly three times higher than the rate for white infants. This disparity is highest in the areas targeted by CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) 2010 Team. CDC funding enabled the Genesee County REACH 2010 Team to partner with diverse community organizations and offer educational classes for African American parents, as well as cultural competency classes for health care providers, to close the gap in the infant mortality rate.

The Genesee County REACH 2010 Team recruited and trained maternal and infant health advocates (MIHAs) to provide broad and comprehensive support to African American women both during and after their pregnancies. MIHAs taught pregnant women healthy eating habits through community dinners called Harambees (Swahili for "pulling together"). The MIHAs also provided support and mentoring to almost 700 pregnant women and helped them to navigate the health care system. In addition, more than 1,079 African American women and 105 African American men attended "One Stop Village" classes, which taught parenting skills and other topics.

The REACH Team conducted 20 "Undoing Racism" workshops that were attended by people from more than 100 organizations, including doctors. The REACH Team also worked collaboratively to develop a standard prenatal screening tool that is being used in 11 local medical offices. Program participants cite this CDC-funded intervention, which reached health care providers and medical students, as a significant step



toward bridging the gap between the medical care system and community members.

CDC's REACH program supports grantees to partner across different sectors of the community to implement evidence-based interventions that reflect the community's individual culture and local realities. CDC provides financial support, as well as technical assistance, training, and consultation for local program leaders on many topics, including planning, implementation, evaluation, and dissemination.

The Genesee County Health Department, which coordinates the program, is one of 40 entities funded under the FY 2007 REACH cooperative agreement program that will establish 18 Centers of Excellence in the Elimination of Disparities (CEEDs). These CEEDs will serve as a regional and national network of resource centers that will disseminate strategies that work in specific ethnic groups. REACH also funds 22 Action Communities that will implement effective public health interventions in their local communities.

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