



## GRASSROOTS HIV PREVENTION THROUGH ENGAGING AFRICAN AMERICANS, A HIGH-RISK POPULATION

### CDC National HIV Statistics

- 1 out of 16 Black men will be diagnosed with HIV <sup>1</sup>
- 1 out of 32 Black women will be diagnosed with HIV <sup>1</sup>
- African Americans accounted for 47% of new HIV diagnoses in 2013 <sup>1</sup>

### High Prevalence of HIV within Black Communities

African Americans (AA) face a higher risk of being exposed to HIV infection with each sexual encounter than do other racial/ethnic groups, even with levels of individual risk behaviors (e.g., sex without a condom, multiple partners) that are comparable to other races/ethnicities BECAUSE:

- The prevalence of HIV is greater in AA communities than in those of other races/ethnicities <sup>1</sup>
- AA are likely to have sexual relations with other AA <sup>1</sup>
- The prevalence of STDs is higher among AA than among other races/ethnicities, and STDs can place individuals at higher risk for HIV infection <sup>1</sup>
- Social and economic realities that exist in some AA communities (e.g. poverty, racial discrimination, unequal access to healthcare, and high rates of incarceration) may lead to increased HIV risk <sup>1</sup>
- Stigma and fear of disclosing risk behavior or sexual orientation may prevent AA from seeking testing, prevention and treatment services <sup>1</sup>

### Black Religion as a Key Role in the Fight against New HIV Infections

- According to the Pew Research Center, Black Americans “are markedly more religious on a variety of measures than the U.S. population as a whole.” <sup>2</sup>
- 87% of Blacks (vs. 83% of all Americans) are affiliated with a religion <sup>2</sup>
- 79% of Blacks (vs. 56% of all Americans) say that religion is “very important in their life” <sup>2</sup>

### AMBASSADOR AT A GLANCE

John Curry works as Peer Educator for Unconditional Love, Incorporated. His credentials in the field of HIV include serving as a Prevention Co-chair of the Central Florida AIDS Planning Consortium, serving as a member of the State of Florida Gay Men’s Workgroup, implementing the Black Treatment Advocate Network in Melbourne, FL, volunteering with Western Judicial Incorporate to facilitate HIV awareness discussions, and chairing a support group for HIV-positive individuals. He has received 29 certifications from HIV-partnered organizations and is a dual graduate of Community Mobilization College and Science and Treatment College. He will earn an Associate of Arts from Eastern Florida State College this fall. Mr. Curry works in HIV prevention to serve as a voice for the many faces of HIV, and to battle discrimination thrown their way. He hopes to address critical issues surrounding HIV which often have a disproportionate effect on African Americans, including social stigma, racism, economic circumstance, family structure, and education.

### Myths about HIV in Faith Communities:

- HIV is a punishment for sinful behaviors
- HIV primarily affects white and gay men
- HIV statistics are a false ploy from the government to make us look bad
- People in monogamous heterosexual relationships/those who are married are not at risk
- HIV is no longer a big deal
- Providing education about safer sex and sexual health makes people engage in sex
- We are powerless to combat the spread of HIV
- Getting tested can cause you to contract HIV
- Active members of the church are not at risk for contracting HIV



### Successes in Engaging the Black Church/Community: Black Treatment Advocate Network in Melbourne, FL

- Engaged HIV education sessions; PREP, MSM, and Black women
- Black faith leaders engaged their congregation in conversations about basic HIV facts
- Black community engaged in local and state HIV planning process (e.g. planning groups to determine logic model and monitoring and evaluation system, community testing, awareness events, educational sessions, bylaws, needs assessments, and stake-holder engagement)
- 15 Black community members qualified to perform HIV testing & counseling in the State of Florida
- 35 engaged members participate in educating the community about HIV.
- 30 HIV testing and awareness events in Black churches and community centers

### Challenges in Engaging the Black Church/Community:

- Most Black churches are comprised primarily of women
  - Essential for faith leaders to understand and address female-specific HIV issues
- Many Black churches have seen a decline in the attendance of male members
  - HIV rates among Black men continue to climb
  - Perhaps by addressing some of the major challenges facing Black men, including HIV, more men would be inclined to return to the church
- Growing LGBTQ community (many of whom attend church)
  - Black churches must acknowledge and discuss this segment of the population
- Stigma still exists in many churches around the topic of HIV
- Churches may see the issue of HIV as outside their purview
- Limited funding to churches has prevented the

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- Cultural Competency
- Developing Strategies for Engaging Key Populations
- Increasing Comfort When Addressing Difficult Topics

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To learn more about the ambassador program, materials discussed, and capacity building offered at no cost please visit our website at [www.HIVCBACenter.org](http://www.HIVCBACenter.org)

#### Works Cited

<sup>1</sup> CDC fact sheet HIV among African Americans. (2015, March). Retrieved from <http://www.cdc.gov/nchhstp/newsroom/docs/cdc-hiv-aa-508.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Sahgal, N. & Smith, G. (2009, January 30). A religious portrait of African Americans. Pew Research Center Religion & Public Life. Retrieved From <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/560/10/>