



BLACK CAUCUS COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

APRIL 26, 2024
“BRIDGING FAITH AND SEXUAL HEALTH
IN THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV”

INTRODUCTION

The “Bridging Faith and Sexual Health in the Fight Against HIV” listening session took place on Friday, April 26, from 6-8 PM at Saint Mark LA United Methodist Church. Facilitated by Dr. Donta Morrison and Lilieth Conolly, the session brought together 16 participants from LA County's Black interfaith communities. It fostered engaging dialogue, resulting in actionable insights addressing the root causes of stigma and shame within the Black interfaith communities, addressing the disproportionate impact of STIs and HIV. Participants were provided with a \$50 gift card, a nourishing meal, and community resources.

OBJECTIVE

Through community listening sessions focusing on seven key populations identified in the Black Caucus (formerly the Black/African American Community Taskforce [BAAC]) recommendations, we aim to quantify the sexual health needs of Black communities in Los Angeles County. These discussions will guide improvements in HIV prevention and care service delivery, ensuring cultural responsiveness and a comprehensive understanding of the diverse sexual health care needs of our Black communities in Los Angeles County.



KEY DISCUSSION TAKEAWAYS

Culture of Silence: Within the church, there is a pervasive silence surrounding sexuality and romantic feelings, fostering confusion and encouraging individuals to hide due to prevailing stigma and shame.

Sexuality as Sin: Sexuality is often deemed sinful within church discourse, leading to a widespread avoidance of discussions on the topic.

Harmful Practices: Practices such as attempting to "pray the gay away" persist within certain church circles, perpetuating discrimination and harm.

Safe Spaces for Youth: Some churches prioritize creating safe spaces for youth through dedicated services and panels, fostering an environment where young individuals feel comfortable discussing sensitive topics.

Challenges for Traditional Churches: Traditional churches encounter challenges adapting to the evolving needs of younger generations, often struggling to maintain relevance and engagement.

Eroded Safe Spaces: Historical shifts have eroded the status of Black churches as safe spaces, where they once served as vital sources of information and community resources.

Programs for Youth: Investing in programs tailored to the needs of young people, including dedicated budget allocations, demonstrates a commitment to their well-being and engagement.

Youth Inclusion: Youth inclusion in decision-making processes and leadership development is crucial for ensuring the relevancy and sustainability of church communities.

Progressive Attitudes: While some churches embrace progressive attitudes and demonstrate LGBTQIA+ inclusivity in leadership, many others lag behind in this regard.

Community-Centric Approaches: There is a pressing need for community-centric approaches and increased opportunities for dialogue within faith spaces to address community needs.

Patriarchy: Churches must address the entrenched danger of patriarchy and actively work to dismantle systems that marginalize and silence women's voices.

Collaboration and Unity: Building collaboration and unity among churches is essential, moving away from division and competition towards collective efforts to address societal challenges.

Sexual Health Education: Implementing sexual health education and awareness programs within churches can address stigma and promote understanding of diverse sexualities and identities.

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FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Involvement of Healthcare Professionals in Church Leadership:

- Integrate healthcare professionals into church leadership to provide expertise in addressing sexual health issues within faith communities.

Need for Sexual Health Education and Resources:

- Half of participants feel ill-equipped to discuss sexual health, highlighting a crucial gap in knowledge and resources within faith communities.
- The majority lack awareness of where to refer individuals for sexual health resources, emphasizing the need for accessible and culturally responsive referral systems.
- There is a consensus on the importance of vetting resources to ensure their cultural relevance and effectiveness in supporting sexual health initiatives.

Marketing and Education Strategies:

- Creative marketing strategies, mirroring approaches used on platforms like TikTok, are suggested to promote faith-based sexual health education.
- Normalizing sexual health discussions and incorporating educational materials into various church settings and community events can help destigmatize the topic.

Youth Involvement and Advocacy:

- Incentivize youth involvement and include advocacy and training on STIs and HIV as essential components of comprehensive sexual health initiatives.

- Listening sessions throughout faith communities can provide a platform for individuals to share their experiences and needs.

County Support and Funding:

- Establish a county ambassador program within faith networks to disseminate information and resources effectively.
- Participants express dissatisfaction with current county services and emphasize the need for specific funding and technical assistance tailored for faith communities.
- Technical assistance is needed to build infrastructure, address barriers in grant applications, and provide grant writing training to enhance skills and collaboration among faith leaders.
- Create an incubation academy specific to faith communities to provide technical assistance and support to churches in implementing sexual health programs.
- Propose the creation of a Los Angeles County Coalition of Black Churches, funded via a Request for Proposal (RFP), aimed at combating STIs and HIV, providing comprehensive support and resources, and advocating for the sexual health needs of the community.
- Provide basic HIV, STI, and sexual health training and education to equip faith leaders with the necessary knowledge and skills.
- Offer guidance on how to communicate with individuals living with or at risk of HIV, and how to bridge the gap between faith teachings and scientific knowledge.



FINAL THOUGHTS

The insights gathered from the "Bridging Faith and Sexual Health in the Fight Against HIV" listening session underscore the critical need for culturally responsive HIV prevention and care services within LA County's Black interfaith communities. The session highlighted the pervasive culture of silence and stigma surrounding sexuality, particularly within church settings, and emphasized the importance of fostering open, empathetic dialogue.

Key recommendations include integrating healthcare professionals into church leadership, providing comprehensive sexual health education and resources, and employing creative marketing strategies to normalize sexual health discussions. Additionally, prioritizing youth involvement and establishing a county ambassador program within faith networks were identified as essential steps to enhance community engagement and support.

The proposed creation of a Los Angeles County Coalition of Black Churches, supported by targeted funding and technical assistance, aims to build infrastructure and collaboration among faith leaders. This coalition will play a pivotal role in addressing the sexual health needs of the community, advocating for the inclusion and support of individuals living with or at risk of HIV.

By implementing these recommendations, we can work towards a more inclusive, informed, and supportive environment within our Black interfaith communities, ultimately improving the overall health and well-being of our Black communities.

