



BLACK CAUCUS COMMUNITY LISTENING SESSIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OCTOBER 22, 2024

“VOICES OF STRENGTH: A LISTENING SESSION
FOR BLACK WOMEN ”

INTRODUCTION

On October 22, 2024, the Los Angeles County Commission on HIV Black Caucus hosted a community listening session for Black women at the Dollarhide Community Center in Compton.

The session, facilitated by Danielle Campbell, MPH, PhDc, and Dr. Erica Holmes, brought together 19 Black women to share personal experiences, challenge stereotypes, and discuss systemic and cultural barriers to accessing sexual health services. Participants received a \$50 gift card, catered dinner, and access to women-centered sexual health 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

Barriers to Quality Care: Participants expressed that they often feel dismissed by healthcare providers, with symptoms minimized or ignored. Participants shared stories of delayed diagnoses and the frustration of navigating fragmented systems, where they are forced to repeat medical histories over and over. This lack of continuity creates distrust and leaves them feeling that stereotypes about Black women matter more to providers than actual needs. These experiences make accessing quality care an uphill battle.

Role of Stigma and Silence: Participants shared that stigma around sexual health is a constant barrier. Fear of judgment—both from providers and within their own communities—often makes them hesitant to seek care or speak openly about their concerns. Shame and silence are deeply ingrained, and this culture prevents many of them from advocating for themselves in healthcare settings. These stigmas are not just personal struggles; they're systemic issues that need to be addressed to create safer spaces for us.

Need for Culturally Competent Care: Participants discussed desiring providers who truly understand and respect their unique experiences. Too often, Black women encounter professionals who lack cultural awareness, leaving them feeling unheard and undervalued. Building trust is crucial. Participants expressed the need for healthcare environments where they can have open, judgment-free conversations. When providers listen, validate their concerns, and genuinely care, it makes all the difference.

Holistic Healthcare is Essential: Participants called for integrated, “one-stop-shop” care models that address sexual, mental, and physical health needs in a single location. This approach would reduce barriers, streamline care, and improve communication among providers. A holistic view of health, which recognizes the interconnectedness of these aspects, is critical to ensuring equitable and comprehensive care for Black women.

Importance of Proactive Care: Many participants expressed frustration with having to request sexual health services rather than having them routinely offered by providers. This lack of proactive care often leaves Black women feeling that their needs are deprioritized, particularly when it comes to HIV and STD prevention and testing. “We want providers who take initiative and advocate for our health without us having to demand it.”

Trust in Representation: Participants expressed that having providers who look like them doesn't always guarantee culturally competent care, but it matters when they understand lived experiences. Participants shared that they have encountered providers who share their background yet still perpetuate harmful biases. Trust is built not only through shared identity but through a genuine effort to connect, listen, and treat with dignity and respect..

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FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Address Barriers to Quality Care: Black women continue to face significant barriers to quality care, including dismissive treatment, delayed diagnoses, and fragmented healthcare systems that force them to repeatedly share their medical histories. These experiences, compounded by stereotypes and implicit biases, erode trust and lead to poor health outcomes. To address these challenges, providers must undergo cultural competency training to recognize and eliminate biases, actively listen to patients, and prioritize patient-centered approaches that validate Black women's concerns and build trust.

Combat Stigma and Normalize Sexual Health Conversations: Cultural and societal stigmas around sexual health further exacerbate these issues, often deterring Black women from seeking care or discussing sensitive topics with their providers. Fear of judgment and shame perpetuate a culture of silence, limiting opportunities for self-advocacy and proactive care. Normalizing sexual health discussions in clinical settings and promoting empowering narratives through media and community engagement can help reduce stigma and encourage open dialogue.

Promote Holistic and Integrated Care Models: The interconnected nature of sexual, mental, and physical health highlights the need for holistic and integrated care models. Black women often struggle to access comprehensive services due to fragmented systems. Establishing one-stop-shop care models that co-locate services can streamline access, reduce barriers, and provide a more patient-centered experience. Holistic care approaches that address the whole person, rather than isolated symptoms, are essential.

Empower Black Women Through Education and Community Resources: Participants also emphasized the importance of education and access to resources. Many Black women lack awareness of available services and how to navigate the healthcare system effectively. Non-clinical factors, such as housing, transportation, and mental health support, also play a significant role in overall health. Expanding culturally relevant education, outreach efforts, and partnerships with community organizations can empower Black women to advocate for their health and address these broader needs.

FINAL THOUGHTS

The Women's Listening Session highlighted critical gaps in healthcare for Black women in Los Angeles County and underscored the urgent need for systemic change. The insights shared by participants highlighted the profound impact of cultural stigmas, provider biases, and fragmented care systems on their health outcomes.

The session emphasized that addressing these barriers requires a collaborative effort among providers, policymakers, and community stakeholders to ensure that healthcare systems are equitable, accessible, and culturally competent.

As one participant shared, "There's so much that plays a role in why we speak up, what we say when we speak up, and how we say it." By prioritizing the voices of Black women and taking actionable steps to address their concerns, we can create a healthcare system that truly meets the needs of all its patients.

