



Institute for  
Community  
Health

# A Community-Based Initiative:

## The Men's Health League Program Partnership



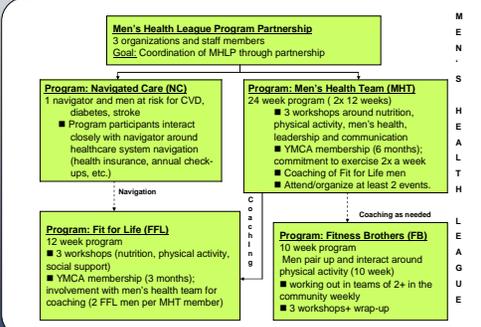
Omonyélé Adjognon, **MS.**, Shalini Tendulkar, **ScD.**, Barbara Kibler, **BA.**, Claude-Alix Jacob, **MPH.**,  
Marsha Lazar, **MSW.**, Albert Pless Jr., **MS.**, Sharon Maher, Matthew Mahoney, **A.C.E P-T.**,  
Elisa Friedman, **MPH.**

### Project Background

In 2007, three institutions in the city of Cambridge—the Cambridge Public Health Department, the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House, and the Cambridge YMCA—joined efforts to address health disparities. The joining of forces among these agencies arose from data that showed higher rates of disease among men of color in Cambridge compared to their white counterparts. These three organizations ("the partnership") proposed to work collaboratively to reduce the risk of diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and stroke among **men of color in Cambridge** through the creation of the *Men's Health League program (MHLP)*.

During the first year of the program, the partnership successfully engaged over 90 men in various initiatives focused on education, nutrition and physical activity. The short-term goals of the initiatives are to: a) increase engagement in physical activity and healthy nutrition, b) increase knowledge around men's health, physical activity and nutrition, c) help men better navigate the healthcare system, and d) increase the men's community involvement. A community-based participatory evaluation was used to gather qualitative and quantitative data on the various program components, as well as to examine the relationships between the organizations and individuals involved in the partnership. The evaluation was led by ICH, a local research organization that conducts Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). ICH and the partnership collaboratively developed both an evaluation plan and evaluation instruments to assess the effectiveness of the partnership in fulfilling its mission.

### Program Components



### The Partnership

#### A-Partnership Strategies

Early on, partner organizations set the stage for collaboration. Meetings were held to:

1. Define roles of each partner organization and the nature of interactions
2. Discuss the evaluation of the initiative and who would be responsible for this
3. Ensure that ongoing dialogue would inform and improve partnership performance. For that purpose, quarterly partnership meetings were held with all partners covering:
  - Updates on partners roles and expectations
  - Summary of accomplishments and next steps
  - Issues and suggestions for improvement

#### B-Partnership Evaluation Methods

The partnership evaluation used a mixed method approach.

1. Qualitative: Partnership interviews
  - Conducted with leaders of the 3 partnership organizations
  - Conducted once a year
2. Quantitative: Partnership survey
  - Online survey tool sent to all partnership members
  - Administered every 6 months

#### 1. The Partnership Interview Protocol

This 8-item questionnaire focused on:

- A. Partnership and program successes
- B. Attributes contributing to successes
- C. Obstacles to the partnership working successfully
- D. Benefits to being engaged in the partnership for individual organizations
- E. Steps to improving the partnership
- F. Potential for future partnership collaborations
- G. Strategies, policies and practices that could be implemented in partner institutions as a result of this partnership

### Partnership Evaluation

#### 2. The Partnership Survey

This 33-item survey focused on:

- A) Demographics
- B) Perception of the partnership
- C) Commitment to the partnership
- D) Capacity building as a result of involvement in the partnership
- E) Communication and collaboration across organizations and individuals involved in the partnership
- F) Evaluation process for the initiative
- G) Satisfaction with partnership's provision of updates to partner organizations and follow-through in resolving issues raised
- H) Perceived role of each partner

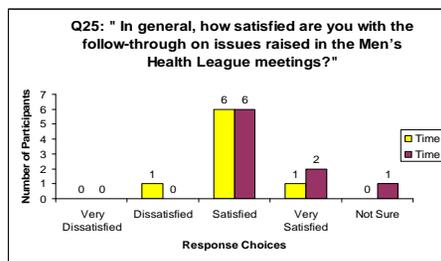
The survey also asked respondents open-ended questions to describe a situation when the partnership had been successful, to share what they thought were obstacles to the partnerships success and what they thought may hinder the cohesiveness of the partnership.

#### C-Partnership Evaluation Results

What did interviewees identify as Partnership Successes? (from Partnership Interviews, N=5)

1. Stronger Relationships between partner organizations
2. Building of organizational capacity
3. Development of new relationships and partners (i.e. a community task force focused on Men's Health was incorporated into the partnership)
4. Communication was working well

The chart below shows sample findings from the partnership survey. Partners were generally satisfied with the follow-through on issues raised in the Men's Health League meetings, both at time 1 (N1=8) and time 2 (N2=9).



### Lessons Learned

The evaluation findings were shared with individuals involved in the partnership. Lessons learned and recommendations for next steps based on the findings were discussed. Lessons learned by the partnership included:

1. Clarify the organizational roles in implementing program activities
2. Manage partner's expectations about the MHLP through ongoing provision of a forum for updates and the sharing of ideas
3. Better communicate around the program implementation process (e.g. scheduling, recruiting men, etc) and ensure partner's equal involvement in program decision-making
4. Improve partnership meetings through a) more effective use of meeting time, b) outside facilitation, c) more thoughtful consideration of who should attend meetings, and d) distinguishing between community stakeholder and program staff meetings
5. Provide more recognition, training and support for MHL program staff
6. Provide a place where partners can openly and comfortably channel their questions and comments, and get answers
7. Request the help of the YMCA to enhance the program by providing accurate user logs for the Fit For Life component of the program.

### Conclusion

The Cambridge Public Health Department, the Margaret Fuller Neighborhood House and the Cambridge Family YMCA successfully partnered and created the Men's Health League Program to help Men of color in Cambridge improve their fitness and overall health behaviors. The findings from the partnership evaluation provide insight on how community-based agencies with varying missions, organizational capacity and resources can combine efforts to reduce health disparities in their communities through close collaboration and open dialogue.