Faith-Based HIV Program Launches in Tennessee for Blacks and Latinos

The Cempa Talks initiative is based in Chattanooga, where more than 55 percent of people living with HIV are African American.

January 4, 2019 By Trent Straube

Thanks to a grant from the Tennessee Department of Health, a new faith-based program called Cempa Talks is launching in Chattanooga to address HIV disparities among the African-American and Latino communities.

Funding was awarded to Cempa Community Care, formerly known as Chattanooga Cares, which offers HIV and sexual health services, education and advocacy.

According to Chattanooga.com, Cempa Talks will include a youth ambassador program as well as symposia held in houses of worship, ministries and youth groups across urban Chattanooga.

The goal is to raise awareness and education about HIV and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and to lower rates of transmission.

Reaching minority communities in the city is important because more than 55 percent of people living with HIV in Chattanooga are African American. Overall in the United States, African Americans represent 12 to 13 percent of the population and account for 44 percent of all HIV diagnoses. In Tennessee, they make up 16 percent of the population but account for 56 percent of all HIV diagnoses, according to data from the state health department.

“With various disparities existing across the state of Tennessee, the Tennessee Department of Health’s Office of Minority Health and Disparities Elimination [OMHDE] work to ensure that we are intentional in our efforts to address those with the greatest need,” said Monique Anthony, director of OMHDE, in the newspaper article. “To protect, promote and improve the health and prosperity of people in Tennessee is our mission. It is our goal to empower communities to support optimal health for all and to eliminate disparities for racial, ethnic and underserved populations. The OMHDE Community and Faith-Based Health Disparities grant is one strategy to build the capacity of our partners and ensure their voices are heard.”

Cempa Community Care will also partner with Chattanooga’s Health and Wellness Council and the Chattanooga-Hamilton County Health Department.

For a related feature in POZ, read “Two Whom We Belong: Building Bridges Between Faith and HIV Communities.”

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