

Tulane Study to Combat High Blood Pressure at Church

The program aims to encourage and educate Black churchgoers to maintain a healthy blood pressure.

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The National Institutes of Health awarded Tulane University a \$7.6 million grant to conduct a five-year study with Cornerstone United Methodist Church in New Orleans to combat [high blood pressure](#) within the African-American community.

High blood pressure, or [hypertension](#), is known as a “silent killer” because people experience few symptoms until it’s too late. The condition is particularly prevalent in Louisiana, where about 46% of Black people have high blood pressure, compared with 38% of white people, according to [American’s Health Rankings](#).

Bettie Rhodes, 73, a retired nurse and the lead of the church’s care ministry, started offering blood pressure readings at Cornerstone twice a month back in 2014 when a survey of congregants showed that about 65% had high blood pressure. She answers questions people may have, offers health advice and helps people understand the importance of reducing their blood pressure via medications or other methods.

Tulane aims to track Cornerstone’s blood pressure program to see whether members can maintain suggested improvements. The university will also provide medication if participants cannot afford it as well as blood pressure monitors for use at home.

The Reverend Johnathan Carlton Richardson told [NOLA.com](#) that the congregation has supported its members and spouses through illnesses such as stroke and COVID-19, which killed six congregants early in the pandemic.

“We have the gamut of all of those right here in this [church](#), which is a snapshot of what’s going on in our community,” Richardson said.

The initiative will last 18 months; researchers will check in on participants six months after it ends to ensure they are still on track.

“What makes this program unique is that they’re going from a bottom-up approach as compared

to a top-down approach,” said Richardson. “Less transactional, more relational.”

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