

Pfizer and Urban League bring health to the 'Block'

Thursday, July 26, 2007 10:15 AM CDT

Co-sponsor health initiative with Federation of Block Units

Consuelo H. Wilkins, MD

American health editor

Last week the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis and its Federation of Block Units (FBU) kicked off its Neighborhood Health and Wellness Initiative. Nearly 100 community leaders attended to learn about the importance of health in our community and innovative approaches to improving it.

Earlier this year, the FBU proposed to mobilize its block units in an effort to increase community awareness about the importance of preventative health care and early intervention, in particular with very high-risk populations.

Dr. Gina Villani, National Urban League vice president of Health and Quality of Life, expressed her excitement about St. Louis' pioneering approach to health and wellness.

"Health and wellness are so important for our community to thrive," said Villani.

"Getting the message out to the community is key to being successful, and this initiative is right on target with our national goals."

The FBU will utilize its structure to provide health education, encourage health screenings, link block unit members to primary care services and encourage the establishment of medical health care homes. The FBU will also develop specific health educational programs and materials to be delivered by trained volunteers and will recruit and train volunteers to deliver health care literacy programs.

Pfizer spokesman Forest Harper said, "Local Urban League affiliates, such as the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis and its auxiliary unit the Federation of Block Units, are well positioned and will play a very significant role in helping the National Urban League accomplish its strategic health and quality-of-life empowerment priorities."

During the symposium, attendees received information about health disparities and simple steps to prevent disease and disability. The program also emphasized social determinants of health, which include access to health services, economic opportunity and equity, educational background, health behaviors, trust in health and research systems, and environmental risk.

According to the Institute of Medicine, individuals and families are embedded within social, political and economic systems that shape behaviors and constrain access to resources necessary to maintain health. Greater emphasis is needed on public health interventions that involve communities, with the goal of collectively identifying resources, needs and solutions.

"Health care is a right. Actually, it is a civil right. And it should be demanded by every American," said Harper.

"There is no reason that anyone in this wealthy nation should go without needed prescription medication."

Harper emphasized that Pfizer is dedicated to community health advocacy and presented a letter of support to Rolandis Nash, vice president of the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis; Norman R. Seay, president of the Federation of Block Units; and Villani.

Pfizer also distributed health literature on diet, exercise and smoking cessation. A toll free number - 1-866-706-2400 - was also given for people with no prescription coverage. This number can be used by anyone who is having difficulty getting prescription medications.

"This is a fantastic way to impact the health of our community, block-by-block," Seay said.

"This appears to be a fitting tribute to the FBU's commitment to the community as it celebrates its 75th anniversary this year."

For more information about the Urban League, visit www.ulstl.org or call 314-615-3600. For more information on health and wellness initiatives of the Urban League, be sure to attend the 2007 National Urban League Conference July 25-28 at America's Center (see insert).