Engaging Communities to Reduce Racial Disparities in Alzheimer’s Research

**Description:** To address the under-representation of African-Americans in Alzheimer’s disease research trials, this project sought to expand the Minority Alzheimer’s Prevention Program into Dane and Rock counties. The main goal was to continue reducing racial disparities in Alzheimer’s research by educating and recruiting African-American volunteers for the UW Alzheimer’s Disease Research Center (ADRC).

**Relevance:** African-Americans comprise more than 13 percent of people older than 54 in the United States and are at a higher risk for Alzheimer’s disease than Caucasians. Various historical, cultural and socioeconomic factors have led to an underrepresentation of African-Americans in clinical studies. For example, more than 90 percent of the current ADRC research subjects are Caucasian.

Recruiting subjects across ethnic and age groups is especially vital for prospective Alzheimer’s research. These studies aim to collect biological samples and medical and lifestyle information from a diverse group of people before they develop symptoms of Alzheimer’s disease or at the preclinical stage. Access to preclinical samples and data from people who did or did not develop Alzheimer’s disease allows scientists to better understand risk factors and to research prevention and treatment options. Without adequate representation of minority communities in the research volunteer pool, it becomes challenging to ensure that treatments developed will be effective across racial and ethnic groups.

Projects like this play a vital role in engaging, educating and recruiting a diversity of research subjects, including African-Americans, to Alzheimer’s disease studies, ultimately helping members of minority communities.

**Results:** Project leaders built community partnerships and strengthened existing ones by attending seminars, festivals, churches and other places with strong African-American participation. At several community gatherings, project personnel offered free Alzheimer’s disease screenings, shared information and answered questions from community members.

These exercises, which were designed to forge relationships with community leaders and members, led to a 31 percent increase in recruitment of African-American volunteers for Alzheimer’s disease studies at the ADRC and an increased participation in various research projects.

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