



African American
Health Program

On a Mission to E.R.A.S.E. Health Disparities

FY23 ANNUAL REPORT



Montgomery County, Maryland
Department of Health and Human Services
Office of Community Affairs
African American Health Program



DHHS
MONTGOMERY COUNTY
Department of Health
and Human Services



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MESSAGE FROM THE PROJECT DIRECTOR



Dear Fellow Champions of Health,

As the project director and the chief executive officer of the contract vendor, McFarland & Associates, Inc., I am pleased to present the annual report for the African American Health Program (AAHP), highlighting the past fiscal year's progress and achievements towards reducing and ultimately erasing health disparities affecting African Americans in Montgomery County, MD. As the vendor implementing AAHP's focus areas, our courage, determination, and diligence have served us well in promoting health and wellness to our neighbors and friends. Each success story, each life touched, brings us closer to a future where health disparities no longer exist.

AAHP's work in Montgomery County has resulted in increased health awareness, community engagement, and meaningful change. This fiscal year, our efforts have enabled countless individuals to access key healthcare services and resources to improve and maintain their health. Through targeted campaigns, we have effectively raised awareness about health disparities affecting African Americans and we have gained support from the medical community, organizations, and politicians. We believe in what we do, and we are proud to witness and benefit from the fruits of our labor.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to AAHP's dedicated staff and our committed stakeholders, partners, and volunteers for their unwavering support on this transformative journey. Your support has fueled our progress and inspired us to reach greater heights. And many thanks to everyone who has spread the word about AAHP's services and events and to anyone who has encouraged and supported a loved one in their quest for better health. Together, we WILL achieve what we have set out to achieve!

Let's keep working to ensure that every Black/African American Montgomery County resident has an equal chance for a healthy, prosperous life!

Warm regards,
George C. McFarland, MSW
Project Director

INTRODUCTION

With hope and progress as guiding forces, the African American Health Program (AAHP) passionately serves Montgomery County by spearheading initiatives to promote health and wellness and reduce health disparities affecting Black/African American County residents. Through a fruitful collaboration between the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and AAHP's Executive Coalition and Executive Committee, with services and programs administered by McFarland & Associates, Inc., AAHP delivers targeted interventions across six key areas that show the most profound health disparities: maternal and infant health, diabetes/heart health, cancer, mental health, oral health, and sexual health. Stemming from a long and painful history of oppression and systemic racism, these disparities perpetuate inequality in every aspect of life for Blacks/African Americans. As AAHP's message and mission transform the health of Blacks/African Americans in Montgomery County, we overcome the ills of the past and tell a new story of health and vitality for the future.



Figure 1. AAHP staff at MLK Day of Service

Blacks/African Americans in Montgomery County are among the wealthiest and most educated populations in the U.S. but are still tragically beset by worse health outcomes than their White counterparts. Montgomery County's Black/African American population also consists of immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean who face unique health challenges. In FY23, AAHP continued to address the unique needs of these populations by orchestrating an impressive array of health promotion programs and services, including health screenings, health education programs, case management services, and more.

AAHP's work has led to increases in breastfeeding rates and positive childbirth outcomes, equipped individuals with the resources to protect their sexual health and maintain their oral health, and empowered individuals to make healthier choices to prevent or delay diabetes and cardiovascular disease and better manage their weight. AAHP also promoted cancer prevention and early detection via health screenings, connected residents to mental health resources via mental wellness screenings, and educated residents on the interplay between physical and mental health. AAHP not only enhanced health outcomes but also fostered a strong sense of community and solidarity among Blacks/African Americans in Montgomery County by hosting and participating in events, creating and coordinating support groups, and establishing fruitful collaborations with local organizations.

A new story awaits Montgomery County in the coming years as AAHP remains committed to driving meaningful progress. This Annual Report documents AAHP's efforts and triumphs in FY23 and how AAHP worked to E.R.A.S.E. health disparities with (e)ducation, (r)esources, (a)ccess, (s)upport, and (e)ngagement:

EDUCATION. Knowledge is indeed the key that unlocks the door to healthier lives for many Blacks/African Americans. Through health education classes, online media, and health awareness campaigns and events, AAHP improved health literacy which ultimately improved health.

RESOURCES. AAHP provided tools, supplies and information to help clients improve and maintain their health. These resources included blood pressure monitors and other health-related equipment, infant care supplies, condoms, oral health supplies, and any and all material goods distributed to support health.

ACCESS. Every resident should have access to high-quality, culturally competent healthcare. AAHP worked to make this a reality by linking uninsured or under-insured clients to free health insurance and by ensuring clients can receive care in their preferred language(s).

SUPPORT. Because AAHP builds relationships with clients based on trust and care, AAHP's clients can rely on AAHP for extensive personalized interventions and assistance tailored to their unique needs.

ENGAGEMENT. AAHP brings people together with dynamic health-related events and empowering support groups to inspire collective action to improve individual and community health and erase health disparities.



Figure 2. AAHP Executive Coalition with Montgomery County Councilmember Gabriel Albornoz



ERASING HEALTH DISPARITIES WITH EDUCATION

Health education is a core component of AAHP’s approach to empowering Black/African American Montgomery County residents to improve their health. Once individuals learn how their diet and lifestyle choices impact their health, they can take action to optimize their health and transform their lives.

CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT CLASSES

In FY23, AAHP’s Chronic Disease Management (CDMP) classes remained at the heart of AAHP’s health education efforts. CDMP classes proved to be a valuable platform for educating Black/African American residents on a range of health topics, with a specific emphasis on learning and implementing healthy habits to prevent and manage chronic diseases. Taking place online, CDMP classes brought experienced instructors teaching advanced, evidence-based, action-oriented health education into the homes of Blacks/African Americans across the County.

Take Control of Your Health classes

Take Control of Your Health classes, conducted on Wednesday and Thursday evenings, discussed chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease; autoimmune disorders like lupus and multiple sclerosis; and disorders and conditions that affect the brain like ADHD, autism, and Alzheimer’s. Subjects such as stress management, physical therapy, eye health, and oral cancer prevention were also thoughtfully covered. These sessions included lectures, guest speakers, and class discussions.

Health and Nutrition classes

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Black/African American adults are more likely to consume diets higher in sodium, added sugars, and unhealthy fats, while simultaneously consuming fewer fruits, vegetables, and whole grains than their White counterparts. This pattern of dietary habits significantly correlates with higher rates of chronic conditions like hypertension, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease among Blacks/African Americans. Learning about nutrition and how diet helps to prevent and manage chronic disease is a foundational step in the process of improving one’s health; Black/African American County residents took that step by attending AAHP’s Health and Nutrition classes.

Held throughout FY23 on Thursdays and selected Mondays and led by a certified nutritionist and Food for Life instructor, Health and Nutrition classes provided a deep exploration of the advantages of a plant-based vegan diet. Attendees learned about the connection between specific foods and certain diseases while also acquiring valuable insights on how to seamlessly integrate wholesome eating practices into their daily lives. The curriculum encompassed a diverse range of subjects, from “breaking food seduction” to themes such as the relationship between food and mood and hormone-related cancers. Through dynamic class discussions, attendees shared health facts, insights, and personal experiences and openly discussed their triumphs and challenges in adopting new foods and recipes within a plant-based diet. In addition to engaging discussions, classes incorporated videos, quizzes, reference documents, as well as exciting cooking demonstrations.

Health and Fitness classes

AAHP offered weekly yoga and ZUMBA classes on Wednesdays and Fridays respectively. These classes encouraged attendees to use their bodies more and to exercise regularly to prevent and manage stress and chronic disease. ZUMBA classes guided attendees through movements to an eclectic mix of R&B, Latin, soul, dance, jazz, and afrobeats, incorporating elastic bands, weights, and any equipment they may have that allowed them to push beyond their limits. Yoga sessions focused on movements that enhanced coordination and balance, providing attendees with a well-rounded fitness experience. Both classes maintained a high level of enthusiasm and active participation, with attendees keeping their cameras on throughout the duration of the class.

Through the valuable knowledge imparted in CDMP classes, attendees not only gained a deeper understanding of health and disease but they also emerged better equipped to make informed decisions about their health, understand medical information, and establish and maintain constructive relationships with their healthcare providers. CDMP class attendees were also motivated to pursue other health promotion services offered by AAHP and by other health-focused organizations and entities. Those who wholeheartedly embraced and adopted the positive lifestyle changes discussed in CDMP classes experienced improved health metrics such as lost weight and lower A1C and many successfully reversed their chronic disease state.



“Kendra,” an older African American woman, has had diabetes and hypertension for more than ten years. She came to CDMP to learn how to better manage her diabetes so she could prevent future complications. Kendra found the support she needed through her engagements with CDMP. She regularly attended CDMP classes, enrolled in AAHP’s RPM (Remote Patient Monitoring) program, started exercising more, and eating less meat and dairy. Due to these lifestyle changes, Kendra reduced her blood pressure and managed her diabetes, bringing her A1C from above 9% down to less than 7%. Her primary care physician has gradually decreased the dosages of her medications.

HEALTH AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS AND EVENTS

Throughout the program year, AAHP conducted and initiated numerous health awareness campaigns and events and disseminated invaluable health information at health fairs, health screenings, and other gatherings. AAHP established a dynamic presence with well-organized information booths, where staff offered “swag bags” filled with pamphlets on diverse health topics catering to various target populations, ranging from AAHP itself to diabetes, heart diseases, stroke, mental health, dental health, weight management, HIV,

pregnancy, youth sexual health, cancer, cholesterol, mammograms, fitness, and more. Staff also engaged in purposeful conversations with community residents and invited them to learn more about health and AAHP’s services. Each event presented the opportunity for AAHP staff to spread the word about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and each conversation had the potential to be lifechanging as attendees could ultimately embark on the journey to pursue those benefits with AAHP’s help.



Figure 3. AAHP staff greets passersby at National Night Out event in White Oak

Table 1. Event Touches FY23

TOUCHES
2,573



Figure 4. AAHP staff at AfroCaribbean Festival

PROMOTING HEALTH ONLINE

Online media has become a primary source of information for people of all ages, especially Blacks/African Americans. **According to Pew Research Center, 45% of online Blacks/African Americans credit the Internet for helping them access information on health and healthcare, compared to 35% of their White counterparts.** AAHP educated and engaged Black/African American County residents online through the AAHP website (www.aahpmontgomerycounty.org), social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter @ aahpmoco), and digital correspondence such as AAHP’s newsletter, *Health Notes*.

AAHP’s online content included valuable health news, tips, and information shared across platforms. *Health Notes* delivered content to a subscriber list of more than 7,000 people. AAHP’s visually appealing and enlightening social media posts were shared widely, expanding AAHP’s influence. On AAHP’s website, visitors had 24-hour access to current and previous *Health Notes* articles and editions, informative videos produced by AAHP staff, and documents, reports, and research on varied health topics. This robust dissemination of information not only empowered individuals with vital insights but also promoted community health education, a critical step towards eradicating health disparities within Montgomery County’s diverse population.

For more information about AAHP’s digital outreach, go to the Digital Outreach section in this Report.

What is Inflammation?

The word “inflammation” is everywhere, but what inflammation actually does to your body is not common knowledge.

Inflammation occurs when the immune system responds to damage caused by bacteria, viruses, toxins, or trauma. In this process, white blood cells rush to the affected area, bringing oxygen and nutrients to promote healing. However, this also causes inflammation. In a healthy body, inflammation is a normal part of healing and lasts only as long as needed; however, if inflammation persists over time, it can become chronic and cause serious health issues.

Chronic inflammation is linked to a variety of diseases including heart disease, diabetes, arthritis, autoimmune diseases, depression, Alzheimer’s disease, and cancer. Studies show that Blacks/African Americans are more likely than other racial groups to experience higher levels of chronic inflammation. Fortunately, there are steps individuals can take to reduce their risk for developing chronic diseases related to high levels of inflammation.

The foods we eat greatly influence our inflammation levels. Foods that can contribute to inflammation include processed meats, fried foods, refined carbohydrates like white bread or white rice, sugary beverages, processed snacks, and alcohol in excess. Foods that fight inflammation include fruits and vegetables like spinach, kale, blueberries, strawberries, oranges, carrots, bell peppers, broccoli, cauliflower and tomatoes; healthy fats such as olive oil, avocado oil or coconut oil; lean proteins like fish and poultry; and nuts, seeds, whole grains, and herbs. You can also reduce inflammation by exercising regularly, getting enough sleep, managing stress effectively, avoiding tobacco use, and getting regular checkups with a healthcare provider.

Source:
 Harvard Health Publishing
 The Cleveland Clinic
 The National Institutes of Health

Reduce your risk for breast cancer.

- Limit alcohol intake
- Don’t smoke
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Exercise
- Get enough sleep
- Breastfeed

4 likes

aahpmoco You CAN lower your risk for breast cancer. Maintaining a healthy weight, exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet, limiting alcohol intake, and other health promoting habits can help you prevent breast cancer (and other cancers as well). Additionally, if you are over 40, you should be sure to get regular mammograms.

It’s #BreastCancerAwarenessMonth. Are you doing the best you can to prevent breast cancer?

#MoCoBlackHealth
 #BlackMoCoVsCancer

View 1 comment
 October 26, 2022

Facts About Men's Health

Join in Men's Health Month, a time dedicated to raising awareness about the unique health challenges faced by men. One of the most significant health issues for men is prostate cancer, and understanding how to reduce the risk of this disease is crucial. It is especially important for Black men, as they are more likely to develop prostate cancer and experience more advanced stages of the disease. Regular doctor visits and timely medical care can improve men's health outcomes. Men's health is a complex issue, and seeking medical attention to address prostate and other health concerns can help you prevent breast cancer (and other cancers as well). Additionally, if you are over 40, you should be sure to get regular mammograms.

Positive social relationships can enhance men's health. Strong relationships are linked to better health outcomes, including lower rates of heart disease, stroke, and cancer. Seeking social support and maintaining strong relationships with family and friends can help reduce stress and improve overall health. On the flip side, lacking social support can have a negative impact on men's health. It's important to seek out social support and maintain strong relationships with family and friends. Additionally, if you are over 40, you should be sure to get regular mammograms.

Source:
 www.healthline.com
 www.heart.org
 www.cancer.org
 www.medicinenet.com
 www.heart.org
 www.heart.org

Figure 5. AAHP content from left to right: Health Notes article, social media post, and blog post

ERASING HEALTH DISPARITIES WITH RESOURCES

Providing resources for preventive care, chronic disease management, and mental health services enables AAHP to significantly improve health outcomes and reduce disparities in healthcare access and treatment for Blacks/African Americans, paving the way for greater health equity and well-being.

Access to life-enhancing resources is a challenge for some clients. Despite Montgomery County's status as one of the wealthiest counties in the U.S., some residents continue to struggle financially. AAHP provided access to disseminated tools, equipment, supplies, and other free health resources to ensure that Black/African American Montgomery County residents had these resources irrespective of their financial circumstances. In this process, AAHP facilitated access to tools and resources that helped some of the most vulnerable County residents improve and manage their health.

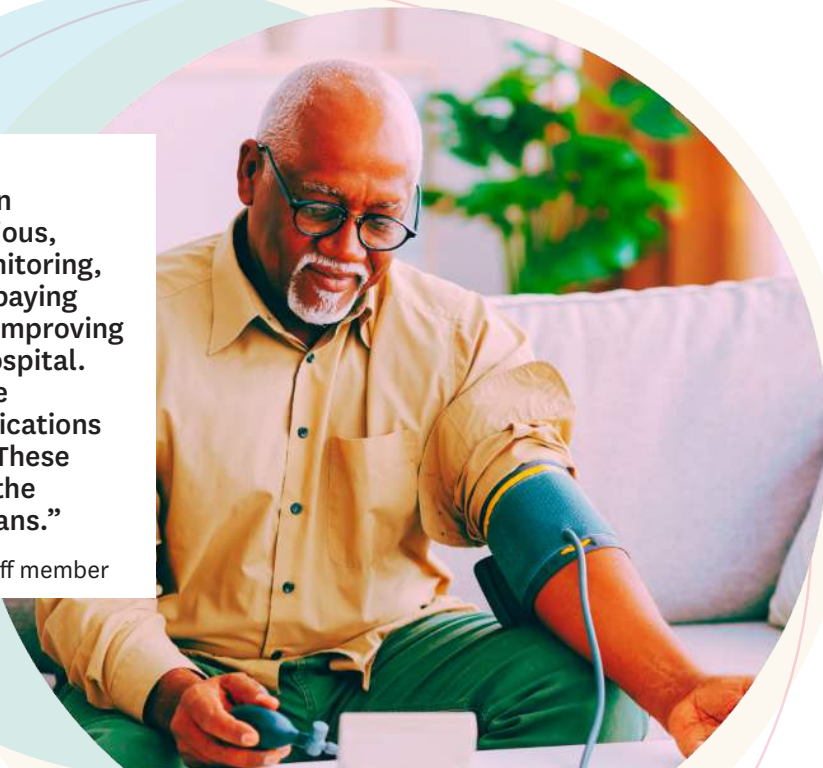
Every month throughout FY23, AAHP's SMILE team managed the distribution of cribs, car seats, and other infant care items to SMILE moms who recently gave birth. The provision of these items free of cost offered significant financial relief to economically disadvantaged SMILE moms and their families. SMILE moms also received resources for housing, food assistance, child care, diapers, and other resources as needed.

Participants enrolled in AAHP's Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM) program received free blood pressure monitors and body weight scales to track their blood pressure and weight on a regular basis. This self-monitoring equipment unlocked access to the most powerful resource of all: knowledge. Once participants knew the actual numerical values representing their health, they felt motivated to proceed with consequential actions to improve those numbers. They were encouraged to share those numbers with their primary care providers and develop and adhere to a plan of action to reduce their weight and blood pressure. Clients who followed their plan of action eventually lost weight and reduced their blood pressure. For many people, knowing one's numbers set off the chain of events that ultimately led to better health.

To promote success with individual goals, health monitoring supplies and equipment have been generally available to all AAHP clients.

“When the focus is on prevention rather than treatment, the impact is not always as obvious, but it is immense. With remote patient monitoring, having hypertensive and diabetic patients paying attention to their numbers is undoubtedly improving their health and keeping them out of the hospital. Primary care physicians are now able to see reports with daily readings and adjust medications and health recommendations accordingly. These preventive measures are chipping away at the disparities affecting Blacks/African Americans.”

-AAHP staff member



MENTAL WELLNESS SCREENINGS

AAHP's mental wellness screening tools promote access to mental health care services. Offered online on AAHP's website as well as in-person by AAHP's social worker, these anonymous mental wellness screenings ask a series of questions and provide preliminary assessments for anxiety, depression, eating disorders, psychosis, bipolar disorder, substance abuse, alcohol addiction, and other conditions. Upon completion, the screening tools offer preliminary diagnoses and identify local resources for those needing treatment and therapy. These screenings served as a gateway to mental health care services, helping individuals overcome stigma and ensuring that they received timely and appropriate care. *Read the mental health section of this report to learn more about AAHP's mental wellness screenings.*

AAHP distributed health resources at health fairs, presentations, and events at schools, colleges, churches, community centers and other venues. Aiming to reach as many individuals as possible, AAHP staff actively engaged with attendees and discussed AAHP's programs and services while distributing swag bags containing a range of items focused on health. These items included condoms to encourage safe sex practices and toothbrushes for promoting oral health. By engaging positively with the community, AAHP effectively utilized these vital resources to promote health and well-being among Black/African American County residents.

Table 2. In- Person Screenings Conducted FY23

SCREENS
1,201

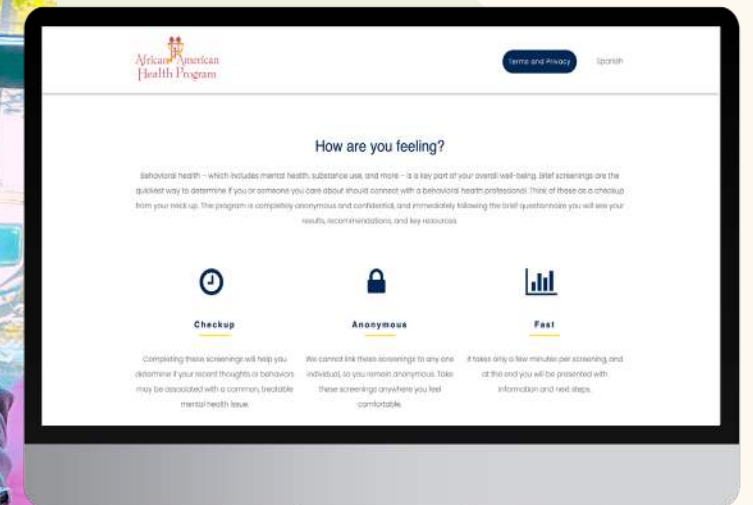


Figure 7. Screenshot of AAHP's mental health screening tool

Figure 6. An event attendee completes a mental health screening assessment

ERASING HEALTH DISPARITIES WITH ACCESS

Lack of access to health information, services and care greatly contributes to health disparities. AAHP aims to reduce health disparities by creating easier routes to healthcare for Black/African American County residents.

Through AAHP's connection with the Kaiser Foundation's Community Health Access Program (CHAP), AAHP facilitated access to free health insurance for families and individuals who were ineligible for other health plans like Medicaid, Medicare, job-based health plans, or financial help through the Maryland Health Connection. Participating in CHAP not only saved residents thousands of dollars but also significantly increased their access to essential health services. In FY23, AAHP's dedicated social worker successfully re-enrolled 24 out of the 25 enrollees from the previous year.

During the program year, CHAP awarded AAHP's vendor, McFarland & Associates, Inc. a generous grant of \$25,000 for AAHP to provide training and technical support to help newly enrolled beneficiaries learn how to navigate Kaiser's online client portal. As each beneficiary learned how to complete tasks like schedule appointments, manage prescriptions, and access their personal health information, they were empowered to take charge of their own health. As a result, AAHP significantly improved the accessibility of health management for enrollees.

Access to health insurance is important but individuals also need access to their own doctors for complete care. AAHP recognizes that lack of access to a primary care physician (PCP) can hinder individuals in their health journey. To address this challenge, AAHP strongly encouraged clients to establish a relationship with a PCP to facilitate improved healthcare access and continuity of care.

AAHP places a strong emphasis on linguistic inclusivity in its services, recognizing that many clients have limited English proficiency. To bridge this gap, AAHP provided translation and interpretation services, ensuring more seamless interactions between clients and healthcare providers. This commitment extends to AAHP's website, which provides language translation features for wider accessibility. AAHP also distributed marketing materials in French and Amharic, which is spoken by West African and Ethiopian/Eritrean immigrants respectively. AAHP's commitment to linguistic inclusivity was particularly evident during an outreach event targeting the local Ethiopian/Eritrean community, where over 19 individuals from these communities were screened in their own language.

On October 26, 2022, AAHP facilitated a presentation by a French-speaking associate from the Center for Immigrants. The presentation covered relevant topics such as citizenship classes, English classes, public school enrollment, immigrant counseling, free legal services, and other game-changing resources. The event garnered strong attendance and active participation, showing the value of language-accessible information and services. This connection encapsulates AAHP's dedication to overcoming the language barrier that might impede access to care for African immigrant residents.



ERASING HEALTH DISPARITIES WITH SUPPORT

AAHP always extends a helping hand to individuals taking charge of their own health. Whether an individual aims to maintain or reverse a chronic condition, seeks to enhance or optimize their health, or intends to improve their health, AAHP works diligently to provide useful support and partnership on their journey to better health and wellbeing.

AAHP staff stands beside clients as they face some of the biggest challenges of their lives, such as when they're fighting to lose weight or when they're navigating pregnancy and postpartum reality for the first time. To give clients the care they need, staff drew from their professional expertise and experience as well as from their compassion and capacity to serve.

The profound impact of AAHP's support is no clearer than with AAHP's nurse case management services implemented by the SMILE team. From the time a mom is pregnant up until the child's first birthday, SMILE moms can rely on SMILE nurses as part of their healthcare team. SMILE nurses helped SMILE moms prepare for childbirth, secured infant care needs and family resources, provided instruction and guidance on breastfeeding and caring for a newborn, and so much more. This intensive level of support and care greatly benefited Black/African American moms and their babies and families and ultimately led to better pregnancy and childbirth outcomes.

Historically, Black/African American women have struggled with complicated barriers to breastfeeding, contributing to lower breastfeeding rates. To counter this, the SMILE team provided extensive encouragement and support for breastfeeding. For SMILE moms experiencing difficulty with breastfeeding, SMILE nurses were just a call or click away to provide guidance, answer questions, and offer insights through phone and video consultations. The SMILE team also created a culture of support by establishing and coordinating support groups like Mommy Chat and the Breastfeeding Support Circle, ensuring that additional layers of support were readily available for moms.



Figure 8. SMILE mom holds baby



AAHP's Weight Management Program (WMP) was instrumental in addressing the health disparities related to obesity within the Black/African American community. While it's worth noting that some WMP participants join the program with the goal of gaining weight, the overwhelming majority are on a weight loss journey.

Obesity stands as a grievous and persistent health concern, as almost one in three (30.7%) adults is overweight, more than two in five (42.4%) adults are obese, and nearly half (49.6%) of Blacks/African Americans are overweight or obese.¹ Obesity contributes to a range of detrimental health outcomes, including depression, heart disease, and cancer. While the correlation between obesity and chronic disease is well-established, the goal of sustainable weight loss remains a significant challenge for most.

The WMP's strategy to help clients achieve their goal weight was to create a roadmap for making positive lifestyle changes and establish strong partnerships to facilitate support and accountability with that plan.

The WMP also hosted group exercise sessions every other Saturday at parks and recreation centers and special events to transform exercise into an enjoyable and easily accessible experience. The WMP motivated participants to embrace a fitness regimen tailored to their unique lifestyle. In this shared journey, participants naturally rallied together and created a community of support.

Similarly, the CDMP classes transcended mere educational sessions on health conditions; they cultivated a profoundly nurturing atmosphere for participants as they grew in knowledge together. CDMP instructors availed themselves to answer questions outside of class time and maintained contact with each participant to keep them engaged and focused on their health goals. Weekly calls by the AAHP staff served as a testament to their dedication as they kept attendees engaged not only in the classes but also in their health aspirations. Through the creation of this robust, health-centric environment, AAHP team provided crucial support.

¹ National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Disorders: <https://www.niddk.nih.gov/health-information/health-statistics/overweight-obesity>



ERASING HEALTH DISPARITIES WITH ENGAGEMENT

AAHP hosted and participated in community events, forging connections with individuals and organizations who share AAHP's vision for a healthier Black/African American population in Montgomery County. With information booths, free health screenings, presentations, interactive workshops, and more, AAHP built and contributed to dynamic platforms for disseminating valuable health information and resources.

The events below reflect the variety of events AAHP hosts and participates in.

“Jamaica 60” Celebration at Sligo Seventh Day Adventist Church

AAHP provided health screenings and distributed health information at Sligo Seventh Day Adventist Church's celebration of the 60th anniversary of Jamaica's independence. This event provided the opportunity for AAHP to engage with the Caribbean community in Montgomery County.



Mount Jezreel and Sharp Street churches

AAHP and Mount Jezreel Baptist Church organized a comprehensive health information dissemination and health screening event that featured the Mammovan DC, which offered critical mammogram screenings to the Mount Jezreel church community. On another occasion on the same day, AAHP staff joined Sharp Street United Methodist Church in commemorating the church's remarkable 200-year legacy of service to the community as the oldest Black/African American church in Montgomery County.

TIMELINE OF SELECTED EVENTS (CONT'D)

Lauren Tatum Foundation Event

AAHP staff and the Lauren Tatum Foundation organized an event to honor the life of Lauren Tatum, AAHP's former receptionist who passed away from colon cancer at a young age. With colon cancer being the second-leading cause of cancer-related deaths among individuals of African descent, the event aimed to raise awareness and educate the community about the importance of cancer prevention.

Pink Life Gala

AAHP's staff collaborated with Serena Holtz, AAHP nurse and breast cancer warrior to plan and execute the "Pink Life Gala," a heartfelt event honoring women battling breast cancer. The gala held profound significance as a part of the nurse's legacy as she ultimately died from breast cancer in May 2023.

Ethiopian/Eritrean Health Fair

AAHP hosted a fantastic event at the White Oak Recreation Center for the Ethiopian/Eritrean community, drawing a large and enthusiastic crowd. Attendees had a chance to get screened for high blood pressure, HIV, and mental health. Attendees also enjoyed a special guest, a respected community member, sharing insights about healthy eating in a presentation that featured live food demos, nutrition tips, and tasty samples of meals made from traditional Ethiopian ingredients.



TIMELINE OF SELECTED EVENTS (CONT'D)

AAHP Aging Subcommittee Aging Summit

AAHP staff attended and assisted with AAHP Aging Subcommittee's Second Aging Summit at the Silver Spring Civic Building. Residents of all ages interacted with AAHP staff, participated in health screenings, and gathered useful health information.

Thanksgiving Day Parade

AAHP's WMP participants joined 20 AAHP staff and volunteers to march in Montgomery County's Thanksgiving Day Parade. AAHP's contingent seized the opportunity to promote AAHP's programs and services to other parade-goers.

Health fair at Wheaton Woods Elementary

AAHP staff collaborated with Wheaton Woods Elementary School staff to organize a winter wellness health fair. Families had the opportunity to participate in health screenings and enjoy winter-themed crafting activities. AAHP's booth was among the most popular ones, featuring blood pressure and blood glucose tests along with brochures and pamphlets covering various health topics. The event aimed to promote preventive health measures and encourage healthy habits within families.

Dr. Martin Luther King Day of Service

AAHP celebrated Dr. Martin Luther King's legacy with a series of health-focused activities. At an event hosted by the Montgomery County chapter of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc., AAHP was honored for its outstanding work in reducing health disparities before a crowd of more than 1,000 people, including respected Maryland State and County elected officials. Also on this day, AAHP staff actively participated in the Dr. Martin Luther King Day of Service hosted by the Montgomery County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. at the Silver Spring Civic Building.



TIMELINE OF SELECTED EVENTS (CONT'D)

February 7 - National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

To raise awareness about the state of HIV/AIDS/STIs in Montgomery County and to encourage residents to get tested and know their status, AAHP hosted its very first National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day (NBHAAD) event at the Sandy Spring Museum. Skillfully moderated by AAHP's clinical director, the panel of experts, which included professionals from the Dennis Avenue Health Center's HIV/STI programs and Gilead Sciences, Inc., discussed the impact of HIV among individuals of African descent in Montgomery County. Attendees also had the chance to get tested for HIV/AIDS and hepatitis C. Distinguished guests, such as the newly elected District 7 Councilmember of Montgomery County, the interim director of the Department of Health and Human Services, and the recently confirmed County health officer, added to the event's prestige. The response was overwhelming, with 85 participants registering (reaching maximum capacity), and an impressive 562 attending in person and virtually on Eventbrite.



TIMELINE OF SELECTED EVENTS (CONT'D)

AAHP Community Day 2023

AAHP Community Day 2023 brought community members together to celebrate AAHP and AAHP's work to promote health and wellness in Montgomery County. This year's event focused on cultivating young minds and emphasized the importance of involving children in health promotion and wellness activities. The children in attendance enjoyed age-appropriate STEM activities.



Ross Boddy Health Fair

AAHP staff actively participated in a day-long health fair and community celebration at the Ross Boddy Community Recreation Center in Sandy Spring, Maryland. This event allowed AAHP to connect with the community and share important health information and also provided an opportunity to educate County Council members, including the County Council President, about the many services AAHP provides.

Juneteenth at the Scotland Community

AAHP staff enthusiastically joined the Scotland Juneteenth celebration, working alongside several County organizations. This event was a spotlight for a wide array of health and wellness services accessible to Black/African Americans in the Potomac region of Montgomery County. Notably, it drew the attention of the County's executive leaders, Montgomery County Council members, and the chair of the County's Oversight subcommittee for the Department of Health and Human Services, creating another opportunity for AAHP staff to connect with influential community figures.

FOCUS AREA HIGHLIGHTS

MATERNAL AND INFANT HEALTH

In FY23, AAHP's S.M.I.L.E. (Start More Infants Living Equally) Healthy Program continued to provide exceptional prenatal and postpartum services and care free of charge to Black/African American County residents. In this effort, the SMILE program's dedicated and compassionate nurses worked in concert with AAHP's social worker, nurse supervisor, clinical director, and community health workers to develop and implement personalized care plans for each client. These plans included nurse case management, childbirth and breastfeeding support, physical and mental health guidance, and advocacy. **These robust efforts helped support moms for the birth of 86 babies in FY23.**

According to Montgomery County's Fetal & Infant Mortality Review Board Community Action Team (FIMR-CAT), in 2021, Black/African American women accounted for 43% of fetal and infant losses, despite constituting approximately 20% of births in the County. Because such losses can be attributed to specific social and medical risk factors, the dedicated SMILE team took proactive measures to promptly identify and mitigate these risks. Moms with medical risks faced conditions like gestational diabetes, pre-eclampsia, and obesity. These mothers were referred to AAHP's CDMP program and other community networks for comprehensive support. Moms with high social risk encountered challenges such as limited access to transportation, homelessness, safety concerns, isolation, and a lack of support from intimate partners, family, or the community. In response, AAHP's collaborative efforts swung into action, mobilizing its social worker, SMILE nurse, and a wealth of County services to uplift these clients and provide the necessary support to ensure a healthy pregnancy, delivery, and postpartum period.



“While we as a County have made progress in reducing the health disparities faced by Blacks/African American mothers, more work remains to be done. Our hope is that [our events] will raise greater awareness and advocacy within our communities, so that we can continue to positively impact the health of our families.”

- Co-chair of AAHP's Executive Committee

The SMILE team also coordinated support groups, facilitated access to resources, and conducted education campaigns for SMILE clients, always emphasizing and encouraging breastfeeding so that SMILE moms and babies can reap the numerous benefits of breastfeeding. Historically, Black/African American women have faced barriers to breastfeeding, which has resulted in lower rates of breastfeeding.

A pivotal factor in driving increased breastfeeding rates has been the creation of the Breastfeeding Support Circle, which provided a platform for mothers to share experiences and learn from one another. The Circle's discussions have covered various topics, such as breastfeeding after a c-section, infant oral care, alcohol consumption while breastfeeding, returning to work, weaning toddlers, and optimal breastfeeding positions.

In July 2022, the SMILE team created Mommy Chat, a safe and supportive forum for mothers to connect, share experiences, and learn from each other. Through engaging biweekly virtual group sessions, moms come together to express concerns, access important information, and gain insights from expert guest speakers. Throughout the year, the SMILE program curated a series of Mommy Chat sessions, covering crucial topics such as sexual health, SNAP benefits, food distribution, and career skills.

In a special event held in October, the SMILE team hosted a two-day hybrid educational session focusing on childbirth and breastfeeding. This session, which delved into labor, delivery, and postpartum infant care with an emphasis on breastfeeding, was live-streamed for remote access.

The SMILE team continued to diligently promote its services through strategic outreach efforts across diverse venues such as doctor's offices, community centers, places of worship, and educational institutions throughout the County. In November, the program introduced new initiatives, including walk-in clinics for prenatal and postnatal mothers, providing personalized one-on-one sessions with nurses. Additionally, a dedicated Instagram account was launched to enhance engagement for Mommy Chat, the Breastfeeding Support Circle, and the Walk-in Breastfeeding Clinic. This platform also serves to dispatch updates about upcoming classes and resources, including food, diapers, and assistance for applications for programs like SNAP and the Women, Infants & Children (WIC) Program, a nutritional supplement program supported by state, local, and federal governments.

To better serve current and future SMILE clients, the SMILE team asked participants to complete a satisfaction survey to identify opportunities for improvement. The survey focused on five key areas: the overall experience of the assigned nurse case manager, the experience of the last encounter, the value of educational information, the likelihood of re-joining the program, and additional information for other AAHP programs offered. Each survey received ratings of either "excellent" or "good" in all categories. Staff discussed the improvement strategies for all items listed as "good."



Table 3. SMILE FY23 Dashboard

TOTAL S.M.I.L.E. BABIES BORN IN FY23 86	AVERAGE BABIES BORN PER MONTH 7	AVERAGE CASELOAD PER MONTH 195
	AVERAGE PRETERM BABIES BORN PER MONTH 0-1	AVERAGE DISCHARGES PER MONTH 10
	TOTAL PRETERM BABIES BORN 7	AVERAGE NEW ENROLLEES PER MONTH 16

Chart 1. SMILE Moms' Ethnic Origins FY23

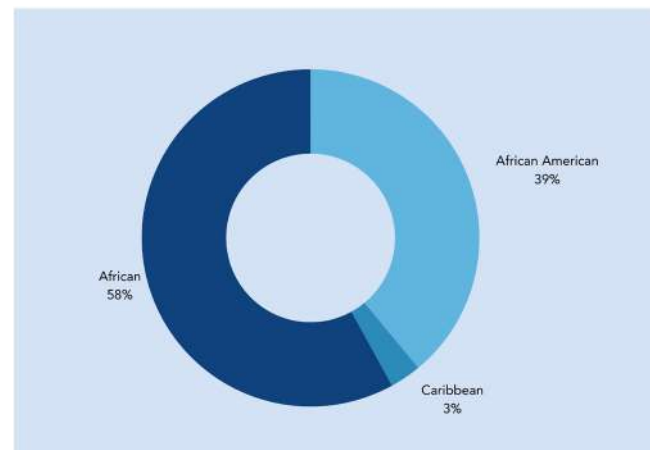


Chart 2. SMILE Moms Percent Breastfeeding



Table 4. Resources Provided to SMILE Moms FY23

HOUSING ARRANGED 16	FOOD ASSISTANCE 486
CRIBS 92	CAR SEATS 86
	DIAPERS 4,000

S.M.I.L.E. EVENT HIGHLIGHTS

FIMR-CAT Virtual Town Hall

An AAHP SMILE nurse served as an expert panelist at the Fetal & Infant Mortality Review Board Community Action Team (FIMR-CAT) meeting co-sponsored by Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated, Potomac Valley Chapter, and a Montgomery County councilmember. This event underscored the value of AAHP's partnerships with other agencies and organizations committed to reducing maternal and infant mortality and morbidity among Blacks/African Americans.

SMILE graduation

AAHP hosted two memorable events in 2022 to celebrate the SMILE Graduation Ceremony and holiday party. On December 21, 15 mothers and their babies joined in the festivities, while the April graduation brought together 20 mothers and their babies. Both ceremonies were filled with educational presentations, raffles, and a heartwarming art activity led by an instructor. Each graduate received a well-deserved certificate and a \$25 gift card, making these events truly unforgettable.



S.M.I.L.E. EVENT HIGHLIGHTS (CONT'D)

Black Maternal Health Week

AAHP proudly participated in Black Maternal Health Week (BMHW) from April 11-17 and the Montgomery County Council's proclamation on Tuesday, April 11. The annual campaign, founded and led by the Black Mamas Matter Alliance, aims to raise awareness, activism, and community-building around Blacks/African Americans and maternal health. This year's theme, "Our Bodies Belong to Us: Restoring Black Autonomy and Joy," highlighted the importance of Black/African American women taking control of their bodies and healthcare decisions.



Right from the Start

AAHP, Improved Pregnancy Outcomes Program, Early Child Services, and Babies Born Healthy, all programs and initiatives of the County's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), hosted "Right from the Start" a free health event focused on maternal and infant health. Attendees at the event learned about healthy habits in the years before pregnancy, caring for children from infancy through kindergarten/first grade, and developmental milestones in early childhood.

FOCUS AREA HIGHLIGHTS

HIV/AIDS/STI PREVENTION

AAHP's HIV navigator, social worker, and community health workers stand on the front lines of the fight against HIV/AIDS/STIs in Montgomery County. Shockingly, the rate of Blacks/African Americans living with HIV in Montgomery County is four to ten times the rate of White Americans. The infection rates for syphilis, gonorrhea, and chlamydia were several times higher among Blacks/African Americans compared to White Americans. AAHP addressed these startling disparities with a comprehensive suite of impactful services, campaigns, and events that ignited sexual health awareness and promoted delivery of sexual health resources among Black/African American County residents.

In FY23, AAHP continued to provide free and confidential screenings at various events and locations across the County. Utilizing rapid HIV tests, the process remained safe, effective, and confidential. Upon receiving a preliminary diagnosis, individuals were offered counseling and personalized health care referrals to facilitate timely and appropriate support. In FY23, all HIV tests conducted were negative.

AAHP's commitment to providing accessible testing, confidential support, and personalized care plays a vital role in fostering a healthier County. Particularly, AAHP's focus on offering prevention services to underserved and homeless Montgomery County residents actively addressed the disparities in HIV rates among the community.

AAHP's commitment extended to supporting and empowering HIV-positive residents, aiding them in their journey toward optimal health and preventing further infections. AAHP's HIV navigator conducted home visits for individuals living with HIV, ensuring compliance with medication, appointments, and preventive measures, while also establishing connections to vital social resources.

AAHP also promoted sexual health awareness in the context of helping teens navigate sexual relationships. AAHP partnered with Montgomery County high schools, Montgomery College, and community organizations for special events and presentations on healthy relationships, sexual consent, domestic violence, and other topics that are top of mind for young people managing intimate relationships for the first time.

Table 5. HIV Testing Data FY23

BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALES TESTED	BLACK/AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES TESTED
262	316
TOTAL	TOTAL
22	26
MONTHLY AVERAGE	MONTHLY AVERAGE
BLACKS/AFRICAN AMERICANS TESTED	
578	
OTHERS TESTED	
213	



FOCUS AREA HIGHLIGHTS

CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT

CDMP CLASSES

In FY23, AAHP continued to promote behavior change and empower Black/African American County residents with education, resources, and guidance to manage and improve their health and wellbeing by offering Chronic Disease Management (CDMP) classes online throughout the week. In a move to further inspire participants, AAHP renamed “Kick Start Your Health” classes to “Take Control of Your Health” classes in January 2023. Through this transition, AAHP asserted to each participant that they are the architects of their own well-being and they must assume full responsibility for their health journey, with AAHP serving as an enthusiastic and steadfast coach.

Take Control of Your Health classes explored prevention and management of a wide variety of diseases and disorders. Health and Nutrition classes discussed the benefits of a vegan, plant-based diet and presented cooking demonstrations of healthy food recipes for attendees to try. Health and Fitness sessions included yoga and ZUMBA classes, which incorporated guided movements, dance, and exercise to demonstrate the positive impact of physical activity on managing stress and reducing the risk for chronic disease.

AAHP offered 354 CDMP class sessions during FY23 and attained a total attendance of 4,026.

Table 6. CDMP Class Attendance FY23

	HEALTH AND NUTRITION	TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEALTH I	TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR HEALTH II	HEALTH AND FITNESS
JULY	80	49	54	101
AUGUST	138	86	69	130
SEPTEMBER	119	65	76	101
OCTOBER	104	65	59	90
NOVEMBER	82	102	56	72
DECEMBER	74	61	66	48
JANUARY	83	75	86	101
FEBRUARY	141	74	91	120
MARCH	122	118	109	113
APRIL	113	96	91	88
MAY	125	145	101	87
JUNE	147	103	118	96
AVERAGE ATTENDANCE PER MONTH	98	87	81	88
TOTAL ATTENDANCE FY23	1181	1794	1051	

In FY23, AAHP continued its ongoing engagement with Leisure World of Maryland, an active living community for seniors. In this connection, AAHP’s Food for Life instructor conducted hybrid Health and Nutrition classes that included in-person biometric screenings at noon, followed by engaging lectures, discussions, and cooking demonstrations live and online at 1 pm.



ROBINA BARLOW
FOOD FOR LIFE INSTRUCTOR



Figure 9. AAHP’s food for Life instructor records in-person Health and Nutrition class live for online audiences

HEALTH & NUTRITION HYBRID CLASS
Thursday, September 8

LOCATION:
 Leisure World
 3300 N Leisure World Blvd
 in Silver Spring

TIME:
 12:00-1:00 (health screenings)
 1:00-2:30 (class)

Recipes:

- Summer Harvest Tortilla Soup
- Watermelon Strawberry Smoothie
- Snickerdoodle Hummus

Join Us!

African American Health Program

For more information, call (240) 777-1833

Figure 10. Social media post advertising Health and Nutrition class

HEALTH SCREENINGS

Because many chronic conditions can silently develop without noticeable symptoms, tracking and understanding one’s biometrics (blood pressure, blood glucose, BMI, A1C, cholesterol, etc.) is critical. AAHP provided FREE biometric health screenings at events and other locations by request. Screenings were performed by a team of health care professionals that included physicians, nurses, and community health workers. Screening results were reviewed and participants were counseled on their screening results. Individuals with abnormal values were referred to a physician for further evaluation and the CDMP for health education.

In FY23, the CDMP was active in the community and **completed biometric health screenings for more than 2,203 people.** The team maintained standing meetings with homeless shelters, routinely scheduled screenings at Hampshire Towers Apartments and was invited by organizations to conduct health screenings at community health fairs.

REMOTE PATIENT MONITORING PROGRAM

CDMP's Remote Patient Monitoring (RPM) program, in its second year, continued to raise clients' awareness of their biometric readings. Participants aimed to log their blood pressure and weight measurements for a minimum of 16 days each month. In this process, participants focused on understanding their health metrics on a routine basis. While attaining 16 readings was demanding for some, it remained a commendable goal.

Throughout FY23, the **RPM program maintained an average monthly caseload of 14. On a monthly basis, an average of 54% of participants met their goal of reporting their biometrics at least 16 days while another 8% reported their biometrics between 10-15 days.** Encouragingly, none of the participants failed to record data or submitted less than five days' worth. Despite the challenge of actively investing in their health, monthly staff support motivated each participant, guiding them towards improved health monitoring.

Table 7. RPM Blood Pressure Metrics FY23

AVERAGE DECREASE IN SYSTOLIC BLOOD PRESSURE	AVERAGE DECREASE IN DIASTOLIC BLOOD PRESSURE
14mmHg	9mmHg



ONLINE DIABETES EDUCATION

According to Healthy Montgomery, Blacks/African Americans have almost four times the hospitalization rate due to diabetes than White residents. To combat this disparity, AAHP uses online diabetes education platforms to educate residents on prevention and management of diabetes.

Diabetes Prevention Program

In FY23, AAHP continued to implement the National Diabetes Prevention Program (DPP) curriculum from the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) that focuses on prediabetes and aims to halt the progression from prediabetes to diabetes with lifestyle change, exercise, and food monitoring. These virtual sessions covered important topics, including diabetes management, blood glucose monitoring, medication management, and lifestyle adjustments. The remarkable 95% retention rate and the strong participant engagement can be credited to the dedicated AAHP staff who consistently reached out to participants, monitoring their progress and carefully documenting weight and activity minutes. As a result of these efforts, some participants reversed prediabetes in FY23.

In June, AAHP received a five-year full recognition status from the CDC for the effective implementation of its DPP.

Table 8. DPP Performance FY23 Cohort 1

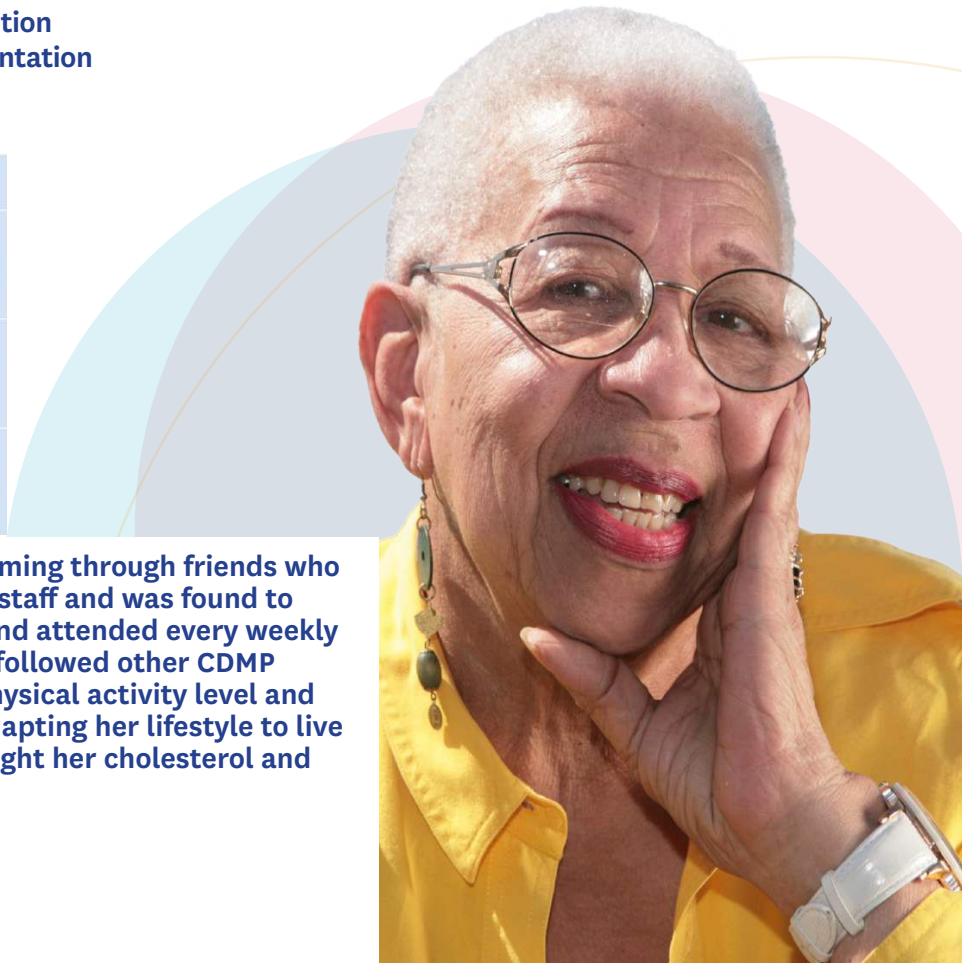
HEALTH METRICS	BASELINE	MIDPOINT	END POINT	GOAL
AVERAGE WEIGHT (LBS.)	213.3	203.1	199.2	200
AVERAGE WEEKLY ACTIVITY (MINUTES)	140	217	235	230
AVERAGE HG A1C (%)	5.91%	5.7%	5.65%	5.6%

Ms. A.M. heard about AAHP’s CDMP programming through friends who have attended classes. She was screened by staff and was found to have prediabetes. She joined the DPP class and attended every weekly session during the first six months. She also followed other CDMP offerings to improve her diet, increase her physical activity level and learn skills to reduce stress. As a result of adapting her lifestyle to live healthier, she reversed prediabetes and brought her cholesterol and blood pressure under control.

dMeetings

During FY23, AAHP’s online diabetes education platform, dMeetings, had enrolled a total of 18 participants in its first cohort, with 14 participants receiving certificates of completion of the program and 10 participants reversing their diabetes numbers. Unfortunately, in September, the creator of dMeetings communicated to AAHP that the platform could no longer be supported, prompting AAHP to place the well-established online diabetes education course on hold, despite an increasing number of subscribers in recent months. Between July 2021 and August 2022, dMeetings enrolled 181 participants, and 53 of them successfully earned their certificates of completion.

AAHP has initiated efforts to introduce a new online course and is collaborating with a doctor to offer an American Diabetes Association (ADA) Association of Diabetes Care and Education Specialists (ADCES) program. These classes will primarily concentrate on diabetes and heart health, covering topics such as medication management, physical fitness, nutrition, and strategies for preventing and managing diabetes and cardiovascular disease.



WEIGHT MANAGEMENT PROGRAM (WMP)

AAHP's Weight Management Program (WMP) continued to provide support and guidance to Black/African American County residents seeking to better manage their weight. Through nutrition education, meal planning, and ongoing encouragement and support, the WMP helped participants establish healthy eating habits and make sustainable changes that contribute to long-term weight management success.

To energize and engage WMP participants, the WMP launched Monday Morning Motivation sessions on Zoom. During these 30-minute calls, attendees discussed a thoughtfully chosen relatable quote, explored a designated topic, and ended with open dialogue. Topics discussed were related to weight and keeping a healthy attitude about food.

The WMP director worked closely with each participant to develop a customized meal plan that aligned with their goals and dietary preferences. To supplement the nutrition component, throughout the fiscal year on alternate Saturdays, the WMP director coordinated group exercise events in one of Montgomery County's beautiful parks or trails. These events not only promoted physical activity but also instilled discipline and nurtured a sense of community and fellowship among participants. The program catered to diverse goals, encompassing those who aimed to maintain their current weight and those desiring weight loss.

Noteworthy WMP events included:

- ▶ WMP participants and AAHP staff walking together at the Thanksgiving Day Parade in Downtown Silver Spring.
- ▶ AAHP joining forces with Girl Trek, a Black/African American women-led organization that promotes walking and physical activity, for a walk at Sligo Creek Trail.

Based on available data, an average of nine people attended WMP fitness events in FY23. Except when the weather was inclement, two events were held per month.



FOCUS AREA HIGHLIGHTS

CANCER PREVENTION

Cancer is the second-leading cause of death and illness in Montgomery County. With a focus on the cancers that display the greatest disparities between Black/African Americans and White County residents (namely breast, colorectal, and prostate cancers), AAHP extended significant education and resources towards cancer prevention and unwavering support and guidance for Blacks/African Americans who have or have had cancer.

Cancer prevention education remained a core feature of AAHP's CDMP classes and a key thrust behind the directives to maintain a healthy weight, exercise regularly, not smoke, eat a healthy diet, drink alcohol only in moderation, get regular screening tests and practice other health promoting habits. Beyond education, AAHP conducted biometric screenings to identify cancer-linked conditions and followed up with referrals for crucial screenings, such as mammograms and prostate exams. By combining education and proactive screening, AAHP aimed to create a comprehensive approach to cancer prevention and management.

At AAHP, cancer prevention is not just a class topic but also a personal journey that some staff have experienced firsthand. Instructors drew from their own personal experiences with cancer to educate and inspire participants. By sharing their challenges and triumphs, instructors reinforced the key teachings of the CDMP curriculum, which accentuated prevention through healthy lifestyle choices and regular screenings. Attendees benefited from the practical insights and relatable experiences shared, and developed a deeper understanding of cancer prevention and how to promote better health outcomes for our community.

In April, AAHP recruited a new full-time cancer prevention coordinator to further strengthen the program's emphasis on reducing the prevalence and incidence of cancers among Black/African American County residents. Shortly after her tenure began, she launched Cancer Chat n' Chew, a biweekly support and discussion group for people battling cancer.



Figure 11. AAHP staff and late AAHP staff member and breast cancer advocate Serena Holtz at Susan G. Komen Parade, where she was honored as Survivor of the Year on October



FOCUS AREA HIGHLIGHTS

MENTAL HEALTH

The impact of mental health and mental illness on Blacks/African Americans is immense. Blacks/African Americans are as likely to experience mental health conditions and mental illness, but are less likely to get professional treatment. Blacks/African Americans also face the added stress of racism, a major stressor that drives chronic illnesses and contributes to premature death.

AAHP created pathways to mental health treatment by offering both in-person and online mental wellness screenings. At health screening events, while AAHP's community health workers conducted biometric screenings, AAHP's social worker conducted mental wellness screenings and counseled participants on how they can and why they should destigmatize mental health conditions and illnesses. AAHP maintained the stance that mental health is inextricably linked to, and is as important as, physical health and someone suffering from a mental health condition should pursue interventions and treatments with the same level of urgency and freedom from shame that is appropriate for physical conditions.

AAHP's social worker and SMILE nurses often joined forces to cater to the unique mental health needs of SMILE clients. Many clients fell under the "high social risk" category, confronting challenges such as partner abandonment, domestic violence, immigration status, financial struggles, and frustrations in accessing Montgomery County services. Because chronic stress can contribute to adverse pregnancy outcomes, including preterm labor, AAHP's social worker endeavored to mitigate the stress-inducing circumstances, encouraged them to seek therapy, and helped them access essential County services.

AAHP's mental health screening tool continued to be a mainstay of AAHP's mental health services as AAHP's website visitors accessed AAHP's online screening tool and gained access to professional referrals upon completing their assessments.

Aligned with efforts to shed light on the impact of mental health to overall health, AAHP initiated and hosted two new programs:

- ▶ In observance of Minority Mental Health Month, AAHP held a compelling online seminar on July 28, 2022, titled "The Elephant in the Room." The webinar explored the profound impact of racism on the health and well-being of Blacks/African Americans and acknowledged the incredible strength and resilience of Blacks/African Americans.
- ▶ In April 2023, AAHP launched "Your Inner Health," an ongoing series focused on cultivating self-awareness and navigating mental health through open and engaging conversations. Topics have included the distinction between mental health and mental illness, the stigma surrounding mental health, and challenging one's own perceptions. Individuals sought therapeutic referrals afterward, a testament to the immediate impact on those in need.



FOCUS AREA HIGHLIGHTS

ORAL HEALTH

Among racial and ethnic groups, Blacks/African Americans have been found to have the poorest oral health. According to *Health Survey in Montgomery County, MD, 2022*, **0.8% of White residents reported never having visited the dentist, 8.3% of Black/African American residents reported they had never visited the dentist. Furthermore, 72% of White residents had seen a dentist within the past year, compared to only 61% of Black/African American residents. In the age group of 35-44, Blacks/African Americans experience untreated tooth decay at double the rate of their White counterparts.** These numbers underscore the urgent need for continued efforts to improve oral health access and care among Blacks/African Americans.

To tackle these disparities in oral health, AAHP raised awareness about the importance of oral health and emphasized the significance of developing good oral health habits from an early age to prevent tooth decay and oral cancers in the future. Some CDMP classes discussed the intimate connection between oral health and chronic disease. For example, cardiovascular disease is linked to periodontal issues, as bacteria from

infected gums can cause inflammation in the blood vessels. Understanding potential health outcomes helps individuals make better choices. Regular dental check-ups, proper oral hygiene practices, and close monitoring of chronic conditions can help prevent further complications.

In FY23, AAHP pursued partnerships to incorporate teledentistry services into its referral system. Teledentistry provides remote dental care, guidance, education, and treatment, which can be especially advantageous for SMILE clients who often lead busy lives and may face challenges related to access to transportation. In other settings, the implementation of teledentistry has resulted in improved plaque control, decreased cavities, and significant reductions in emergency dental visits. Establishing an efficient referral process to accommodate the routine and emergency dental needs of SMILE clients and their children will help AAHP make strides in diminishing disparities related to oral health.



ADMINISTRATION AND TECHNOLOGY

Technology plays a central role in optimizing program services and streamlining administrative processes. Aware that successful implementation of technology ultimately contributes to better health outcomes for AAHP's target population, AAHP continued to explore and proficiently adopt innovative tools and software solutions in FY23.

To manage direct communication with current and prospective SMILE clients, AAHP incorporated text messaging via the SONAR texting platform into the SMILE program's marketing and recruitment efforts. SMILE clients (and their partners) received visually appealing campaigns and event reminders which boosted attendance at Mommy Chat sessions.

AAHP staff continued to utilize the Comprehensive Management Information System (CMIS) to electronically record program, employee, and client data. Staff members attended multiple training sessions to ensure they were adept at using the CMIS. To ensure the accuracy of data, CMIS entries were cross-referenced with data from manually generated spreadsheets. The precision of CMIS data is of paramount importance, as it forms the foundation for informed decision-making and effective program management.

AAHP made two strategic additions to staff in FY23. After identifying key deficiencies in health services for Blacks/African Americans in the County, evaluating AAHP's own collective expertise and capacity, and considering input from current staff members, AAHP sought and hired two new professionals: a cancer prevention specialist and a mental health specialist. This expansion prompted comprehensive training sessions aimed at equipping all staff with the skills and expertise to advance AAHP's ongoing success.

To support the education and development of aspiring health professionals, AAHP provided valuable internship opportunities to graduate and undergraduate students from esteemed institutions such as the University of Maryland School of Public Health, the University of Maryland School of Nursing, George Washington University, and Morgan State University. AAHP's interns provided assistance for SMILE moms with elevated social risks and gathered language-accessible resources and information for moms whose first language is French. These efforts show how AAHP's interns lived up to AAHP's core principle of meeting people where they are.



Figure 12. Staff training

DIGITAL OUTREACH

Health Notes

In FY23, AAHP's monthly e-newsletter, *Health Notes*, continued to serve as a powerful communication tool, effectively connecting with a substantial monthly readership of over 7,000 subscribers. A vital voice in Montgomery County, *Health Notes* promoted health awareness campaigns, provided compelling health information, and kept readers abreast of AAHP's upcoming health and wellness events. With articles covering a wide range of topics along with helpful tips, videos, and recipes, *Health Notes* transformed health information into a source of inspiration and tangible guidance.

Health Notes published a number of especially meaningful articles over the program year. They include:

- ▶ "A Message from AAHP's Weight Management Program," published in July's "Be the Change" edition, was penned by AAHP's Weight Management Program coordinator. The article invited readers to work with her to craft a weight management plan of action.
- ▶ "Gun Violence is a Major Health Issue," published in August's "An August of Abundance" issue discussed the growing impact of gun violence on Blacks/African Americans, emphasizing that Black/African American children were ten times more likely to die from gun violence than White children.
- ▶ "Winning Against Breast Cancer," published in October's "Off-the-Charts Health Smarts" commemorated Breast Cancer Awareness Month and acknowledged the remarkable work of an exceptional AAHP staff member who made significant strides in her community while fighting breast cancer.



Figure 13. Health Notes January 2023

Table 9. FY23 Health Notes Metrics

AVERAGE MONTHLY SENDS	AVERAGE MONTHLY OPENS	AVERAGE MONTHLY OPEN RATE
7,083	2,018	30%
+170% since FY22	+217% since FY22	+3% since FY22

SOCIAL MEDIA

In FY23, AAHP's Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter accounts (@aahpmoco) continued to publish engaging and enlightening content. Posts included informative ads about AAHP's upcoming CDMP classes, health news and advisories, recipes and more.

The promotion of health awareness campaigns remained a core part of AAHP's social media strategy. Popular health awareness campaigns such as American Heart Month in February, National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day on February 7, Minority Health Month in April, and Diabetes Awareness Month in November generated a great deal of content and engagement. Some observances presented opportunities for AAHP to share relevant content from prominent health organizations; for example, during National Nutrition Month in March, AAHP shared content produced by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics and during Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, AAHP shared content from loveisrespect.org (a project of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). These occasions allowed AAHP to align itself with purposeful content and expose AAHP's followers to influential voices that could further motivate them on their path towards better health.

The creation of a new social media account was a highlight of AAHP's social media efforts. To drive recruitment for new SMILE moms and to provide direct information on maternal and infant health to current SMILE moms, AAHP's SMILE Program launched a new Instagram account (@aahp_s.m.i.l.e.). By sharing posts from the SMILE Program's Instagram account, AAHP's Instagram account effectively attracted new followers, amplifying the program's message and fostering a stronger sense of community.

AAHP's social media channels heavily advertised for AAHP Community Day in April and May 2023. On Instagram, a series of six coordinated posts were posted to occupy two rows on the profile grid, creating a visually appealing multi-post banner to draw attention to this flagship event. Each post within the banner contained details about a particular aspect of the event that attendees would enjoy.


Table 10. FY23 Facebook Metrics

	LIKES/FOLLOWERS		SINCE LAST FY	
	903		+149 +20%	
FY23 POSTS	FY23 REACTIONS	FY23 COMMENTS	FY23 SHARES	
19 MONTHLY AVERAGE	25 MONTHLY AVERAGE	2 MONTHLY AVERAGE	11 MONTHLY AVERAGE	
233 YEARLY TOTAL	301 YEARLY TOTAL	21 YEARLY TOTAL	135 YEARLY TOTAL	

Table 11. FY23 Instagram Metrics

	LIKES/FOLLOWERS		SINCE LAST FY	
	325		+60 +23%	
FY23 POSTS	FY23 LIKES	FY23 IMPRESSIONS	FY23 LINKIN.BIO CLICKS	
18 MONTHLY AVERAGE	13 MONTHLY AVERAGE	346 MONTHLY AVERAGE	2 MONTHLY AVERAGE	
215 YEARLY TOTAL	452 YEARLY TOTAL	4,148 YEARLY TOTAL	18 YEARLY TOTAL	

Table 12. FY23 Twitter Metrics

	FOLLOWERS		SINCE LAST FISCAL YEAR	
	177		+255 +15%	
FY23 TWEETS	FY23 REACTIONS	FY23 MENTIONS	FY23 PROFILE VISITS	
16 MONTHLY AVERAGE	11 MONTHLY AVERAGE	5 MONTHLY AVERAGE	1,821 MONTHLY AVERAGE	
197 YEARLY TOTAL	128 YEARLY TOTAL	55 YEARLY TOTAL	21,848 YEARLY TOTAL	

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Through strategic partnerships with organizations, healthcare providers, and community leaders, AAHP extended its reach to more people and significantly amplified its impact. By uniting community partners and resources in a collaborative and effective manner, AAHP advanced towards its vision of a Montgomery County where Blacks/African Americans experience the same level of health as the broader population.

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adventist Health Care Center for Health Equity & Wellness Adventist Hospital Aetna's Community Development Department African American Advisory Committee Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Theta Omega Chapter Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity American Bone Health American Diversity Group Anthem Health Asbury Methodist Village ASPIRE Black Women's Health Imperative Bones N Balance Brothers Against Breast Cancer Clinical Solutions, Inc. Colesville United Methodist Church Cygnus Research Corporation Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., Montgomery County (M.D.) Alumnae Chapter Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Potomac Valley Chapter The Fatherhood Initiative First Baptist Church of KenGar Generation Hope Girl Trek Howard University Cancer Center Howard University School of Divinity Kelly Collaborative Medicine, L.L.C. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kingdom Fellowship A.M.E. (KFAME) Church Kings & Priest International Church Know Your Lemons Lee's Little Leapers Leisure World Association of African American Culture Living Beyond Breast Cancer Manna Foods Maryland State Office on HIV & AIDS MedStar Montgomery Medical Center MobileMed Montgomery College Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth & Families Montgomery County Department of Recreation Montgomery County Fire & Rescue Service Montgomery County Domestic Violence Coordinating Council Montgomery County Food Council The Montgomery County Gentlemen Montgomery County Housing Opportunities Commission Montgomery County NAACP Montgomery County Office on Aging & Disabilities Montgomery County Office of Community & Family Engagement Montgomery County Public Schools Montgomery County School Health Services Mt. Calvary Baptist Church Mt. Jezreel Baptist Church | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> My Active Senior My Style Matters NAACP Montgomery County Branch Parents' Council National Center for Health Care Capacity Building Plum Gar Recreation Center The Prevention of Blindness Society of Metropolitan Washington Progress Place Quality of Life Pharmacy & Health, Inc. Relay for Life ResCare Rockville Senior Center So Others Might Eat Soroptimist International of the Americas Sweets Girlz Temporary Assistance for Needy Families The People's Community Baptist Church Touch4Life University of Maryland School of Public Health & Kinesiology Us Helping Us United Healthcare Upcounty Prevention Network Warriors in Pink Washington Adventist Hospital Outpatient Cancer Education Program Washington Regional Transplant Community WISH (Wellness & Independence for Seniors at Home) White Oak Recreation Center |
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