“Preaching the message of good health”

There’s a different kind of sermon being preached at Linda Vista Baptist Church these days. Community health advocates are targeting local churches with predominantly African American congregations to spread the word about healthy living habits.

Fliers, newsletters and weekly announcements that promote a change in lifestyle to help eliminate health disparities in the African American population can be found at these churches.

Groups like the San Diego Black Health Associates and UCSD’s Cancer Center are working actively with churches to reach out to the community.

According to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, African American women are disproportionately affected by breast cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and infant mortality.

Charlie Huff-McTyer, the executive director for the San Diego Black Health Associates, says there is a history of mistrust and mistreatment between health care providers and the African American community.

Huff-McTyer targets churches for health outreach because he feels the congregations are more in tune with church leaders and faith-based organizations than with health providers.

The San Diego Black Health Associates is a San Diego based non-profit health services organization that promotes education and advocacy.

Huff-McTyer said the number of disparities in African Americans is “deplorable” when compared to other groups.

“As a member of this group, I have a personal stake in seeing this community flourish,” said McTyer.

McTyer said there has been success with the group’s breast cancer awareness campaigns and many women have been diagnosed after receiving mammograms or doing self-examinations.

McTyer said the group’s anti-smoking campaign has also been very effective in teaching African Americans about the risks of lung cancer.

McTyer also works with the Quality Assurance Program, through the California Black Health Network (CBHN). The program educates people on health disparities and good primary health care.

Julius Philips, the African American outreach coordinator for UCSD’s Cancer Center, has also targeted churches to help build trust with the community, acknowledge concerns and break down barriers.

“The plight that the African American community is in is almost like an epidemic,” said Philips.

Education and participation in clinical trials are crucial for eliminating disparities, Philips said.

“If every medicine made, is made for white males, there’s no medicine for me,” said Philips.
Philips has participated in four clinical trials that monitored his nutritional habits, cholesterol intake and sleep habits.

For more information on clinical trials, contact (858) 657-7020