

Sisters United: Promoting Healthy Habits, Protecting Our Babies

Location: Arkansas

Date Submitted: October 2017

Category: **Emerging**

BACKGROUND

Sisters United was created to address each contributing factor of infant mortality in the African American community. Specifically, in looking at infant mortality among AA's The Office of Minority Health and Health Disparity initially looked at six areas of focus. They were low birth rate, birth defects, immunization rates during pregnancy, SIDS, breastfeeding and tobacco use. Prematurity and low birth rate was the leading cause of AA death in the first month of life which is almost entirely due to AAs having 3Xs the rate of premature deliveries before 28 weeks compared to other races. In terms of birth defects, they are the second leading cause of AA death in the first year of life. About 1 in every 33 babies is born with a birth defect with most occurring in the first 3 months of pregnancy. When looking at immunization rates during pregnancy, we know that an annual flu shot can decrease the chance of the mother and baby dying from the flu by 50%. It can also decrease the chance of them getting the flu and the mother having a premature delivery by 70%. However, in 2010 only 40% of pregnant A/A moms got the flu shot compared to 69% of Latinos' and 66% of White women. In Arkansas, once an infant reaches one month of age, the most common cause of death is SIDS. Always putting a baby to sleep on their back decreases SIDS by 50%, yet only 33% of Black Moms practiced safe sleep, compared to 67% of White Moms who reported that they always put their babies to sleep on their backs. Data in Arkansas also showed that African American women had the lowers breastfeeding rate compared to Whites and Latinos.

TITLE V/MCH BLOCK GRANT MEASURES ADDRESSED

#04. a) Percent of infants who were ever breastfed and **b)** Percent of infants breastfed exclusively through 6 months

#05. Percent of infants placed to sleep on their backs

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

- By December 31, 2020, the Sisters United Campaign will increase awareness of the causes of infant mortality to 80% among sorority members,
- By December 31, 2020, the Sisters United Campaign will increase the percentage of African American women attending safety baby showers by 50%.
- By December 31, 2020, the Sisters United Campaign will increase the percentage of African Americans attending safety baby showers who follow safe sleep practices by 50%.
- By December 31, 2020, the Sisters United Campaign will increase the percentage of African American pregnant women attending safety baby showers who receive an annual flu shot by 50%.
- By December 31, 2020, the Sisters United Campaign will increase the percentage of African American pregnant women attending safety baby showers who breastfeed exclusively for six months by 50%

TARGET POPULATION SERVED

African American Women

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

A train-the-trainer conference was held, and each sorority president was charged with recruiting two to three members from their chapters to attend and become trainers for their respective chapter and the community at large. Trainings focused on preventive measures that directly correlate with the leading causes of infant death. These measures include taking folic acid, getting a flu shot during pregnancy, breastfeeding, and following safe sleep practices. Those chosen to be trainers are effective communicators, well-respected members of their communities, and already had a foundation of trust with the target population.

These trainers are also responsible for presenting 10-minute health education based “mini-trainings” at monthly sorority meetings. The purpose of these mini-trainings is to provide information and education about a single preventive measure—such as safe sleep practices—and help members become comfortable sharing what they learn. Because SISTERS UNITED largely relies on its members to get the message out, ADH purchased flash drives and binders for the sorority members who lead trainings for each chapter. A series of You Tube videos - which feature prominent African-American women health professionals who also belong to one of the SISTERS UNITED sororities- were uploaded onto each flash drive along with various health education materials and talking points. Sorority members complete pre- and post-tests before and after completing the trainings and they are used to measure their comprehension of the educational topic being presented. SISTERS UNITED social media pages (Facebook and Twitter) are also used as communication tools to help bring attention the message out to the communities.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES/EVALUATION DATA

2013 Demographic Analysis

- There were 987 participants in the 2013 community survey.
- Of those, 92.2 % were female and 7.8% were male.
- The vast majority of the participants were Black (88.1%), with much smaller percentages of White (6.1%), Hispanic (3.6%), Asian/Pacific Is (1.0%), Multi-Race (0.8%) and Native American (0.4%).
- The majority of the participants were among the 18-24-year-old and 35-44-year-old age groups with 21.4% and 20.4%, respectively.
- 25-34-year olds and 55-64-year olds represented the next largest age groups with 14.5% and 14.6%, respectively.
- The remaining age groups represented were 65 and over (10.2%), <18 (9.5%) and 45-54 (9.4%).
- A look at educational status shows that 60.1% of the participants were college graduates, followed by some college (19.8%), high school graduate (11.9%) and less than high school (8.2%).
- Over fifty percent of the participants (52.9%) did not have children in the household.

The demographic analysis reveals that for 2013 the short-term goal as well as the project objective was achieved.

2013 Pre & Post Survey Results

- In 2013, there were twenty-three pre and post survey questions.
- 231 surveys were in all four focus areas.
- Of the remaining surveys, there were 114 Breastfeeding, 140 Flu shot, 222 Folic Acid and 263 Safe Sleep.
- It would appear that question (2) “The flu can cause a very mild illness in a pregnant woman” was an

issue for respondents as only 29.1% answered it correctly in the pre-test and 25.6% answered it correctly in the post- test.

- The largest positive change was in question (5) “A flu shot during pregnancy can protect an unborn baby” as there was a 25.9 point increase in the percentage of correct responses.
- This change was statistically significant.
- The largest negative change was in question (11) “Folic acid should be taken by a pregnant woman before and during the pregnancy” as there was a 38.4 point decrease in the percentage of correct responses. However, this change was not statistically significant.

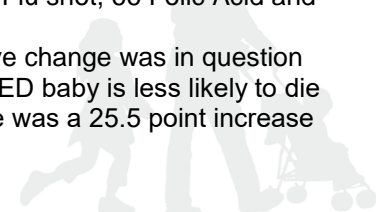
2014 Demographic Analysis

- There were 287 participants in the 2014 community survey.
- Of those, 92.6 % were female and 7.4% were male.
- The vast majority of the participants were Black (89.4%), with much smaller percentages of White (3.5%), Hispanic (3.9%), Native Am (1.8%), Multi-Race (1.1%) and Asian/Pacific Is (0.4%).
- The majority of the participants were among the 25-34-year-old and 35-44-year-old age groups with 25.2% and 23.4%, respectively.
- The next three largest age groups were 45-54-year olds (15.7%), 55-64-year olds (14.2%) and 65 and older (12.4%).
- The remaining age groups represented were 18-24 (6.2%) and <18 (2.9%).
- A look at educational status shows that 67.0% of the participants were college graduates, followed by some college (19.2%), high school graduate (6.7%) and less than high school (7.1%).
- Over seventy percent of the participants (72.3%) did not have children in the household.

The 2014 demographic analysis reveals that once again the short-term goal as well as the project objective was achieved.

2014 Pre & Post Survey Results

- In 2014, there were thirteen pre and post survey questions.
- 165 surveys were in all four focus areas.
- Of the remaining surveys, there were 0 Breastfeeding, 6 Flu shot, 66 Folic Acid and 50 Safe Sleep.
- The largest positive change was in question (9) “A BREASTFED baby is less likely to die of SIDS” as there was a 25.5 point increase



- in the percentage of correct responses. This change was statistically significant.
- The only negative change was in question (12) “Babies are likely to choke if they SLEEP on their back” with a 4.1 point decrease in the percentage of correct responses. However, this change was not statistically significant.
 - There was also a 4.1 point decrease in question (7) “BREASTFED babies are more likely to get sick.” However, this question is unreliable as it was found that the pre- and post-test questions were worded differently on the survey.

PROGRAM COST

\$8,000 annually

ASSETS & CHALLENGES

Assets

Partnerships with:

- African American (AA) Sororities that organize local community events
- The Epidemiology and Health Statistics Branches at the Arkansas Department of Health provide data through Vital statistics and PRAMS used to measure changes in infant mortality as well as other behavior modifications such as changes in breastfeeding, flu shots, and folic acid use.

Challenges

- Getting buy-in from some graduate sorority members
- Recruiting pregnant women to participate in the safety baby showers
- Respondents not fully understanding questions on survey

Overcoming Challenges

- Increasing awareness and benefits of the campaign through social media platforms
- Engaging local health providers to refer pregnant patients to the safety baby showers
- Revising survey questions to make it simpler for respondents to understand

LESSONS LEARNED

- Implementation of new public health services in these times of funding scarcity requires proof of health benefit and cost savings.
- The use of a set of interventions that is coordinated and mutually supportive to bring education and awareness to communities about Infant Mortality.

FUTURE STEPS

- Continue Infant Mortality education through monthly safety baby showers in local communities.
- Provide annual updates and training on Infant Mortality for sorority members.

COLLABORATIONS

- Graduate Chapters Sororities
 - Alpha Kappa Alpha
 - Delta Sigma Theta
 - Zeta Phi Beta
 - Sigma Gamma Rho
- Arkansas Children’s Hospital
- Baptist Health
- March of Dimes
- Cribs for Kids

PEER REVIEW & REPLICATION

Smith, M. R., PhD, MPH, Sharma, R., MSPH, & Grimes, D., MD, MPH. (2014) [Reducing Infant Mortality in Arkansas: A Grassroots Initiative Utilizing African American Sororities in Arkansas](#). *Journal of Arkansas Medical Society*.

The SISTERS UNITED Initiative has been replicated in the following ways:

Families United Campaign (funded by ASTHO/UHF):

ADH Office of Minority Health & Health Disparities used SISTERS UNITED framework including infrastructure, intervention and evaluation methods to educate Latino women receiving prenatal services at ADH maternity clinics in Northwest Arkansas. Similar educational video modules were developed in English and Spanish languages and made available to the trainers and public at the links below:

[Introduction to Families United Gestational Diabetes Management](#)
[Importance of Folic Acid Use](#)
[Importance of Flu Shot during Pregnancy](#)
[Importance of Breastfeeding](#)
[Safe Sleep Position & Location for the Baby](#)

BROTHERS UNITED Initiative is a community based initiative designed to increase public awareness and promote healthy behaviors aimed at reducing infant mortality among African-Americans. The initiative is a partnership among AA fraternity chapter members of Alpha Phi Alpha, Kappa Alpha Psi, Omega Psi Phi, Phi Beta Sigma and Iota Phi Theta. This campaign is the first time the four African-American fraternities of the National Pan-Hellenic Council have taken up an issue collectively. The following educational videos were developed:

[Overview of BROTHERS UNITED Breastfeeding](#)
[Safe Sleep](#)



Mississippi SISTERS UNITED Project

The Mississippi Sisters United project is a partnership between the Mississippi State Department of Health Office of Health Disparity Elimination and the National Pan-Hellenic graduate sorority chapters of Mississippi. Mississippi Sisters United is modeled after an initiative started by the Arkansas Department of Health designed to help educate and empower the African-American community to reduce the state's infant mortality rate.

[Mississippi SISTERS UNITED Impact video](#)

RESOURCES PROVIDED

Several resources are available from the campaign, including YouTube videos:

- SIDS:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wfudqfhjVgs>
- Flu Shot:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAiLaNgarb4>
- Breastfeeding:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PIAycz8DYJk&feature=plcp>
- Folic Acid:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f0Nxhsx9Iok>

Other dissemination resources include:

- SISTERS UNITED Brochures
- Educational Materials
- PowerPoint Presentation
- Discussion Topics
- Social Media
(Facebook: [facebook.com/arsistersunited](https://www.facebook.com/arsistersunited); Twitter: [@ARSistersUnited](https://twitter.com/ARSistersUnited))

Key words:

Infant mortality, African American, breastfeeding, safe sleep, SIDS/SUIDS, folic acid, flu

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