If our community doesn’t step up to learn why African American elders are dying, who will?” – Myron Frasier, CNP Advisory Committee member

The National Cancer Institute recently awarded $2.5 million to fund a partnership between the Institute of Gerontology (HBEC’s umbrella organization) and the Karmanos Cancer Institute. This team will investigate why elderly African Americans have higher rates of certain cancers than their white counterparts. “Lung, prostate, breast and colorectal cancers are more common, and cause more deaths among African American elders,” said Peter Lichtenberg, Ph.D., director of the Institute of Gerontology (IOG). “We want to know why so we can close the gap.”

Karmanos and the IOG will create the Community Networks Program, coordinating more than 20 local organizations to study the problem and determine solutions. “The grant will help us determine what elderly minorities need in terms of cancer education, training and resources,” said Terrance Albrecht, Ph.D., principal investigator for the study. This will include early detection, treatment and routine check-ups, all proven methods to increase the quality of life for elderly persons with cancer. Detroit’s black elders between age 50 and 59 currently have a 122 percent higher rate of death than elders living in the rest of Michigan.
Community Health Forum Series

The Healthier Black Elders Center (HBEC) has begun a new chapter in its commitment to connect Detroit’s seniors and their families to current knowledge about aging and health. This year, HBEC’s free community forums have expanded to include new locations with a broader list of speakers and topics.

Our community health forums include three presentations by experts on various health topics, a brief overview of the HBEC and its resources, and ends with a question-and-answer segment. Forum participants say they especially appreciate being able to interact with doctors, health educators and HBEC/MCUAAAR staff in a relaxed setting. We serve refreshments.

The forums are held monthly from 10-11:30 a.m. on a weekday at various metro locations. This year, forums are slated to begin in October with a broader array of topics plus repeats of the more popular subjects. For details on the Community Forum schedule and topics, please contact Ms. Karen Daniels at (313) 577-2297 or visit us at www.mcuarar.iog.wayne.edu.

Participant Resource Pool

Historically, many African Americans have been reluctant to participate in health-related research projects. Older African Americans were often abused and neglected by a prejudicial health care and medical research system, which fostered a deep distrust that lingers even today. This is unfortunate, since the life expectancy of African Americans continues to trail behind all other races. Recent research reveals that the older adult population in Detroit is dying at a dramatically higher rate than their counterparts living elsewhere in Michigan. African Americans also suffer and die from hypertension, diabetes and heart disease at higher rates than any other race.

With early diagnosis and treatment, these diseases can be controlled and their damaging effects greatly reduced, but more research is required. African American elders, especially, are desperately needed to participate in research related to good health and the prevention of diseases that disproportionately affect their population. To address this problem, in 2002 the HBEC created the Participant Resource Pool to help investigators reach seniors willing to participate in research on aging and health issues. Our goal is to recruit 1,000 African American seniors aged 55 and older through outreach efforts such as community health forums and our Annual Health Reception. Each participant completes a 30-minute survey about their health, general well-being and daily activities. To protect the safety and privacy of the participants and maintain the integrity and quality of the research, a ten-member committee (six members from the community) oversees all research projects. New projects will begin this year, so participants already in the resource pool may be contacted soon by either a Wayne State University or University of Michigan researcher to discuss their interest and participation. For more information on how to become a member of HBEC’s Participant Resource Pool, please call our community outreach specialist, Ms. Karen Daniels, at (313) 577-2297 or log onto www.mcuarar.iog.wayne.edu.

HBEC 3rd Annual Health Reception

The Healthier Black Elders Center (HBEC) held its 3rd Annual Health Reception on the grounds of the Whittier Hotel and Erma Henderson Park on Tuesday June 7, 2005. The attendees gathered under three large lighted tents near the Detroit River to explore the theme of “Maximizing Our Aging Potential.” This year’s reception introduced attendees to the many opportunities, resources, and services available to them through the HBEC. Oil paintings by Mr. James Gibson, Florida Highwayman landscape artist, and Mrs. Carol Hunter, Michigan artist were on display. Charlie Gabriel & Friends International Jazz Band, and the Global Band, featuring vocalist Ms. Valaida Benson, provided music for the afternoon. The senior exercise group – Fired Up Couch Potatoes – got everyone moving, and Bozo John John the clown entertained the crowd with a fun assortment of balloon sculptures.

Our keynote speaker, Dr. Kimberlydawn Wisdom, Michigan’s surgeon general, spoke to a record breaking crowd of over 700 elders. Others included Mr. Henry Haygood, Detroit’s director for Development and Activities; Ms. Tensay Kemley, director of the Detroit Senior Citizen’s Department; Wayne County Commissioner Jewel Ware; Ms. Toni Flowers, project manager for MPRO; and Ms. Earline Traylor, representing the Detroit Area Agency on Aging.

Who’s Who in the HBEC – Meet Melvin Washington

This year we again offered free health screenings and information from over 20 vendors about health, nutrition and aging. An elegant hot lunch was served. Our annual health receptions celebrate healthy living and the successful partnerships that the HBEC and the Institute of Gerontology have built within the community.

Mr. Washington (no relation to HBEC Director Dr. Olivia Washington). “I watch my parents aging, share their troubles and joys, and know how important good health is at every age.” The renovat ed 1927 Whittier Hotel was the landmark Whittier Hotel as luxury riverfront condominiums for seniors and their families. We give Mr. Washington special thanks for his generous three-year commitment to be the primary sponsor for HBEC’s annual Health Reception. “I am honored to be a partner with the HBEC,” says Mr. Washington. “Our elders deserve the best,” he says.