

Creating a Doula Pilot Program to Increase African American Representation and Access to Breastfeeding Support

Ashley Carmenia

At A Glance


In North Carolina, the prevalence of breastfeeding declines steeply when comparing breastfeeding initiation rates to the 12-month marker. In further disaggregating the data, it is shown that African American women have breastfeeding rates that are significantly lower than those of women from other races. In 2021, RAO partnered with Johnson C. Smith University and Novant Health to develop and implement a pilot Doula training program to:

- Create a strategic program model to increase the number of African American doulas in the greater Charlotte region.
- Increase continuity of care and community support for breastfeeding and maternal health by incorporating services into existing community support services.
- Increase the presence of African American doulas in the local hospital systems to help diversify the field of lactation.
- Help address breastfeeding and health disparities and inequities.

Of the 28 applicants that applied to the pilot program scholarship, five African American women were selected from Mecklenburg and Cabarrus counties. Selected recipients in this pilot program completed 16 hours of initial DONA-certified doula training at JCSU, 12 hours of additional training on lactation, breastfeeding, preconception, pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum and newborns, and are currently completing clinical rotations at Novant Presbyterian Medical Center in Charlotte, NC.

Public Health Challenge

In North Carolina, the overall prevalence of breastfeeding initiation was 80.3% having ever breastfed. This rate decreases significantly to 50.3% breastfeeding at six months, and 29.2% breastfeeding at 12 months. Breastfeeding has been shown to improve health outcomes for women and infants; yet, black women initiate and continue breastfeeding at lower rates than their counterparts from different racial groups. Asian mothers had a prevalence of 90.3% in comparison to 73.6% among black mothers. While efforts and interventions targeting breastfeeding initiation and sustainability have been successful and resulted in a positive increase in rates, there are still racial disparities that exist and contribute to the difference in rates – most notably, a lack of providers of color in the field of lactation.



ARE YOU A FIRST TIME MOM IN NEED OF DOULA SUPPORT?

Doula services are being offered free of charge to support expecting mothers and families during the birthing process as part of a pilot Doula program. The Doula Impact Program provides an opportunity for DONA-trained doula students to gain real-time clinical experience servicing new mothers.

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS:

- Must be a first time Mom
- Must be African American/Black
- Identify as non-high-risk
- Deliver at Novant Presbyterian Medical Center
- Deliver between July & September 2021

LIMITED SPACE AVAILABLE

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:
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Approach

RAO Community Health partnered with Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU) and Novant Health Presbyterian Medical Center to develop the inaugural Doula Impact Pilot Program. The goal of the program is to create a strategic program model to increase the numbers of African American doulas in Mecklenburg and Cabarrus County. During the spring of 2021, RAO Community Health offered scholarships to applicants interested in the program. Additionally, the Winer Family Foundation donated additional funding to cover other expenses that the REACH cooperative agreement did not cover. The scholarships and donated funds worked to ease the financial burden for the cost of training and business creation – one of top barriers identified by current doulas. Selected recipients in this pilot program completed 16 hours of initial DONA-certified doula training at JCSU, 12 hours of additional training on lactation, breastfeeding, preconception, pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum and newborns. Additionally, they are receiving direct mentorship from a certified Doula at Novant Health as they complete their clinical experience and work towards certification. Furthermore, RAO created media that was boosted to recruit expecting mothers and offer them free doula services by the doula students to aid them in gaining real-time clinical experience.

Results

The scholarship program received overwhelming interest with close to 30 applicants, from states as far as Arkansas. The flyer designed to advertise the Doula pilot program was boosted via Facebook and Instagram, and received 486 clicks, 16,252 reach, and 53,061 impressions. Of the applicants, five were selected (3 from Mecklenburg County, and 2 from Cabarrus County). The initial cohort of doulas (n=5) began their training in late spring and continued their coursework on various topics, such as lactation and breastfeeding 101, throughout the beginning of the summer. In August 2021, the remaining cohort will begin their clinical rotation at Novant Health Presbyterian Medical Center with estimated completion of certification criteria by the end of September.

"People are often more likely to do something when they see someone who looks like them doing it."

**-Rachel Davis, MPH, RDN, LDN, IBCLC, RLC
Owner, Harmony Nutrition & Lactation, LLC**

What's Next

Through REACH funding, RAO will continue to work to Novant Health and other community partners to formally evaluate the pilot year of the program, as well as begin work to recruit the next cohort of students. Additionally, RAO has several other potential project ideas with community organizations that took interest in the pilot doula program, and would like to work to further expand the reach and impact.

Find Out More

To find out more about RAO Community Health and the work that they are doing with local community partners, visit www.raoassist.org. You can also follow them on Instagram @RAO_Health and Facebook.

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Success Stories <http://nccdqa.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, September 17). *Breastfeeding report card*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/breastfeeding/data/reportcard.htm>.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2019, August 29). *Racial disparities in breastfeeding initiation and duration among U.S. infants born in 2015*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6834a3.htm>.

Charlotte Community Pharmacists Improve Access to Diabetes Self-Management and Support Services in Underserved Communities

Keila Marlin

At A Glance

Diabetes is a significant public health problem in North Carolina, affecting certain racial and ethnic minorities at a disproportionate rate due to a lack of access, socioeconomic status, and cultural attitudes and behaviors. In 2020, RAO Community Health partnered with community pharmacists to increase access and referrals to evidence-based lifestyle management programs that help improve the quality of life for African-American adults with type 2 diabetes. Three pharmacists from two organizations were recruited and trained through the Association of Diabetes Care & Education Specialists' (ADCES) to increase access and referrals into diabetes self-management education and support (DSMES) services in the Charlotte-Metro region. This service was held in a variety of settings, such as: physician offices, clinics, pharmacies, HIPAA-compliant virtual health platforms, and communities. In total, 90 participants were referred to DSMES services in clinical and community settings, 24 were enrolled and 54% identified as African-American.

Public Health Challenge

In 2020, nearly one-half of North Carolinians, or 11.3% of the adult population, have diagnosed diabetes (ADA, 2020). It is projected that over 3,000 people will die directly or indirectly because of diabetes and its complications, ranking North Carolina 7th in the nation for diabetes related deaths (DAC, 2020). Serious complications can be associated with uncontrolled diabetes such as heart disease, hypertension, stroke, vision and hearing loss, nerve damage, depression and kidney failure; all of which negatively impact quality of life. The annual healthcare cost of diabetes in North Carolina is estimated to surpass 17 billion dollars by 2025. On average, those diagnosed with diabetes incur a medical cost of \$16,000 per year, where \$9,000 is attributed to diabetes (ADA, 2020).

Approach

RAO Community Health partnered with Amity Medical Group, Premier Pharmacy Wellness Center, and Centralina Area Agency on Aging to promote and increase referrals into DSMES services for African-American adults with type 2 diabetes. DSMES services are guided by trained diabetes educators that equip participants with self-care behaviors, such as monitoring blood glucose levels, developing problem solving skills, reducing risk to minimize or prevent diabetes related complications; adopting a healthy eating lifestyle; and understanding the whys of medication adherence. Community pharmacists are highly accessible and uniquely positioned to educate, motivate, and empower their patients to manage their diabetes through evidence-based lifestyle management programs. Thus, community pharmacists were recruited and trained as diabetes educators to increase access and referrals to DSMES services in the Charlotte-Metro region. Community pharmacists collaborated with providers and referral specialists to refer and enroll participants based on their A1C levels, medication adherence history and/or eligibility criteria for the Older Americans Act (OAA).

Results

A total of three pharmacists from two organizations that primarily serve underserved communities were recruited to increase access and referrals to evidence-based lifestyle management programs that improve quality of life for African-American adults with type 2 diabetes. Two out of the three pharmacists received specialized training as diabetes care and education specialist from the ADCES. In total, 90 participants were referred to DSMES services in clinical and community settings, 24 were enrolled and 54% identified as African-American.

"I now know how to read food labels correctly, and can keep track of the amount of carbohydrates that are in my favorite foods."
- DSMES Program Participant

What's Next

Through REACH funding, RAO will continue to work with their community partners to address health disparities. In the coming year, RAO has new community organizations that they will be formalizing relationships with, as well as continuing work with current partners that has been delayed due to COVID-19.



Find Out More

To find out more about RAO Community Health and the work that they are doing with local community partners, visit www.raoassist.org. You can also follow them on Instagram @RAO_Health and Facebook.

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Success Stories

<http://nccdqa.cdc.gov/nccdsuccessstories/>

Diabetes North Carolina. (2018, December 10). Diabetes NC. <https://www.diabetesnc.com/>

The Cost of Diabetes | ADA. (2020). The American Diabetes Association. <https://www.diabetes.org/resources/statistics/cost-diabetes>