

Advocates for African American Elders Receives New Funding

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by Maya Meinert

While working in the Seattle area as part of the mayor's special task force on African-American elders, Karen Lincoln spent a lot of time talking to seniors and those who provided services to them. Her job was to advise the mayor on the needs of this population of older adults, and in learning about this community, Lincoln discovered a wealth of information and a deepened respect.



Advocates for African American Elders

“It was through these interactions that I became aware of how dynamic our seniors are, how much they have sacrificed and how hard they have worked to support our communities,” she said.

But when she moved to Los Angeles, Lincoln, now an associate professor at the USC School of Social Work and associate director of the USC Edward R. Roybal Institute on Aging, didn't find the kind of organized group she was part of in Seattle, where she helped to develop a social service agency to serve homebound, frail and low-income African-American elders so they can remain in their homes and communities.

That's why she founded Advocates for African American Elders at the school's Roybal Institute on Aging, which recently received \$150,000 in funding to engage in community outreach and inform policymakers and opinion leaders on healthy aging issues impacting African-American seniors in Los Angeles.

Advocates for African American Elders is funded by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation (TCWF). Created in 1992 as a private independent foundation, TCWF's mission is to improve the health of the people of California by making grants for health promotion, wellness education and disease prevention.

The foundation seeks to elevate underrepresented voices, particularly those of seniors of color.

“Through its community engagement efforts, including activities to integrate the voices and input of various stakeholders, Advocates for African American Elders is well positioned to

assess and inform policymakers on issues critical to the health and well-being of African-American seniors in South Los Angeles,” said Jeffrey S. Kim, TCWF program director.

Founded about a year ago, Advocates for African American Elders is an outreach and engagement partnership that includes community activists and leaders from the Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health, Pacific Clinics, Alzheimer’s Association, AARP, Ward Economic Development Corporation, California Senior Leaders and local churches.

Since then, Advocates for African American Elders has hosted Congresswoman Maxine Waters, who spoke about the fight for the care and support of seniors, especially on the issues of Alzheimer’s disease, elder abuse, housing and quality health care, at its inaugural public event.

It’s this kind of attention-grabbing and informational event that Lincoln plans to continue holding with this new funding. The grant will support activities designed to strengthen and enhance the capacity of Advocates for African American Elders and community stakeholders to understand barriers to community partnerships, educate community members about resources and policies that impact older African Americans, gauge perceptions of clinical, social and mental health services and research, and assess interest in adopting evidence-based practices.

Specifically, the organization has identified four priorities to focus on in the next year: the impacts of the Affordable Care Act (ACA); Dual Eligible Demonstration Project, which is supported by the ACA and allows those who have and qualify for Medicare and Medi-Cal to enroll in a Medicare-managed care health plan; Public Safety Realignment Act, which will release some 20,000 prison parolees into Los Angeles, some of whom are seniors and older veterans; and food insecurity, which is most common among those who are older, low-income, unemployed and African American.

Lincoln said the group will begin its advocacy efforts in these areas by educating African-American seniors about the ACA to ensure they have a voice in how the new health care law is implemented in Los Angeles County and that they benefit from the expanded access to health care.

“These issues are complex and can be confusing for seniors but have a significant impact on their well-being and quality of life,” Lincoln said.