

Call for greater partnership in health



Health experts at Health Disparities Luncheon.

(Photos courtesy Brooklyn Health Disparities Center)

By Nelson A. King

Health experts in Brooklyn have called for the establishment of greater partnerships in addressing what they described as acute health disparities in the borough.

"There's greater need to bring in more partners to conduct more borough-wide research [in health disparities]," said Dr. Ruth Browne, co-director of Brooklyn Health Disparities Center, at a May 5 Borough Hall luncheon.

These partnerships are urgently needed in addressing myriad health problems in the diverse borough, added Browne, who also is chief executive officer of the Brooklyn-based Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health.

Browne outlined a number of steps which, she said, are essential in creating a successful community/academic/government partnership: "Agree on a shared goal; agree on how to share decision-making; share resources; and develop the community."

Yvonne Graham, founder of Brooklyn-based Caribbean Women's Health

Markowitz, said though "considerable progress" has been made in the nation as a whole, in the last few decades, in addressing health issues, Brooklyn, regrettably, has not benefited significantly.

"Unfortunately, not all populations benefit equitably from the fruits of these innovations and technology, as certain groups, particularly the poor, people of color and immigrants, bear the disproportionate burden of poor health resulting in excess morbidity and mortality," she added.

Graham said Brooklyn, which houses one of the largest African-American and Caribbean populations in the nation, demonstrates "poor health indicators, compared to other boroughs of New York City and counties of New York State."

She said it was against this backdrop that the Health Disparities Center was created, "as a means of assessing individual communities within Brooklyn."

Graham said the goal was to "provide leads as to

developing interventions relative to the findings."

In 2003, Markowitz commissioned a study which – given the racial, ethnic, socio-economic and health status of Brooklyn's population – found that there was a "significant need for the creation of a center that addresses health disparities."

The report recommended that SUNY Downstate Medical Center be the site of this Health Disparities Center, "given the expertise, academic excellence and resources available at Downstate."

The Health Disparities Center was, thus, created by SUNY Downstate Medical Center, in collaboration with the Arthur Ashe Institute for Urban Health and the Office of the Borough President.

A number of other institutions have also collaborated with the institute: Kings County Hospital Center; Brookdale Hospital Medical Center; Kingsbrook Jewish Medical Center; Long Island University, Brooklyn Campus; Staten Island

Medgar Evers College.

Participating Community-Based Organizations include the American Cancer Society; Arab-American Family Support Center; Brooklyn Perinatal Network; Flatbush Haitian Center; Haitian Centers Council; Diaspora Community Services; and CWAH.

Dr. Clinton D. Brown, the director of the Brooklyn Health Disparities Center, said the center currently focuses on disparities in cardiovascular diseases, sleep apnea, diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and HIV/AIDS, among others.

He lamented the prevalence of these diseases in Brooklyn, particularly underscoring disproportionate diabetes prevalence in districts, such as Bedford-Stuyvesant, East New York, Crown Heights and Flatbush.

"We need to partner with people who have the skills to help address these concerns," said Dr. Brown, who is also a Clinical Associate Professor of Medicine in the Division of Renal Diseases at SUNY Downstate Medical Center.