

## **Blue Suit Weekend: An Agenda for Men Making The Commitment to Better Health**

In 2005, men in Baltimore were expected to live an average of 8 years less than women.<sup>1</sup> Men in Baltimore are more likely to die of treatable and preventable causes like cancer, heart disease, diabetes, HIV, homicide, and accidents.<sup>2</sup> And yet, men in Baltimore are also less likely to have access to a doctor. There are approximately 170,000 men living in the city between the ages of 18 and 65. It is estimated that at least one-third of them, approximately 60,000, have no health insurance.

We must do better as a city. Blue Suit Weekend aims to increase awareness and services around men's health. It is a unique partnership between the faith community and hospitals. To complement the activities, the Health Department has identified 6 key recommendations for men's health in Baltimore:

- 1) Find a doctor and know your numbers
- 2) Know your HIV status
- 3) Exercise and eat healthy
- 4) Take steps to avoid violence
- 5) Avoid tobacco
- 6) Know About How to Access Treatment for Addiction

The Health Department will make information on these needs and resources to address them available to men in the city.

### **1. Find a Doctor and Know Your Numbers**

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Having a primary care doctor or health care provider improves medical care, increases preventative services, reduces health disparities, and lowers medical costs.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

Yet men are almost twice as likely as women not to have a regular doctor and three times as likely as women not to have seen a doctor in the last year. When asked what they would do if feeling sick or in pain, one out of four men said that they would wait as long as possible before seeing a doctor.<sup>6</sup>

Seeing a doctor regularly can catch problems and disease while they are easier to treat. Depending on a man's personal and family history, it may be important to screen for high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, diabetes, testicular cancer, prostate cancer, and colorectal cancer.

Men should talk to their doctors about which screening tools to use. The important numbers to know will depend on each man's personal and family health history.

- Many men who are uninsured qualify for outpatient coverage under the Primary Adult Care program. In addition, many more qualify for reduced rates at

community health centers in the city. Those seeking a referral to care can call Baltimore HealthCare Access: 410-649-0512 (<http://www.bhca.org/MCHP.htm>).

## **2. Know Your HIV Status**

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HIV is a preventable and treatable disease for those who know their status.

The Centers for Disease Control estimate that 24-27% of people infected do not know that they have HIV.<sup>7</sup> In 2005, the Baltimore metropolitan area ranked second in new AIDS cases in the nation.<sup>8</sup> According to the Maryland AIDS Administration, 65% of new infections from 2004 to 2005 were found in men.<sup>9</sup>

- The Baltimore City Health Department and its community partners offer testing in a variety of community venues across the city. In addition, the city's health clinics offer Free Testing and Treatment at two locations all week long:

1515 W. North Ave: M-F (410-396-0176)  
620 N. Caroline St: M-F (410-396-9410)  
(<http://baltimorehealth.org/std.html>)

## **3. Exercise and Eat Healthy**

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Exercising and eating well can dramatically reduce the risk of heart disease, the leading cause of death in Baltimore City.<sup>10</sup> People who maintain an active lifestyle and avoid being sedentary can lower their risk of developing heart disease by up to 50%.<sup>11</sup> Walking even one hour a week has been shown to reduce risk.<sup>12</sup>

Exercising to maintain a healthy weight and eating a diet low in unsaturated fats and high in fiber can also reduce the risk of developing diabetes.<sup>13</sup> One in ten Baltimore City residents has been diagnosed as having diabetes.<sup>14</sup>

Being overweight increases risk for both diabetes and heart disease. In Baltimore, 30.8% of adults suffer from obesity and 73.5% don't eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables as recommended by the National Cancer Institute.<sup>15</sup> Nearly one in five Baltimoreans say they feel only in fair or poor health.<sup>16</sup>

Simple changes, such as walking more and staying away from fried foods and sugary drinks like soda and sweetened tea can have discernable effects, including increased energy, a stronger immune system, and a fitter body.<sup>17</sup>

- Baltimore's award-winning Recreation and Parks Department has many activities available for people of all ages: 410-396-7900

#### **4. Take Steps to Avoid Violence**

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Homicide is the leading cause of death among young men in Baltimore. Violence can claim lives through domestic disputes, the drug trade, and the escalation of ordinary disputes into tragedy.

Violence can also cause serious injuries, mental health problems, and undermine families.<sup>18</sup>

The costs of violence are high, economically and socially, and extend to all sectors of society. Reducing violence improves the health of individuals, neighborhoods, and communities.

- Stay safe from drugs by reporting illegal drug activity: 410-666-DRUG (3784) (<http://www.baltimorepolice.org/>).
- Stay safe from disputes by getting free mediation to resolve arguments peacefully through Community Mediation: 410-467-9165.
- Stay safe from domestic violence by getting help: 410-889-7884. (<http://www.hruth.org>).

#### **5. Avoid Tobacco**

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Smoking is the leading cause of preventable death in the United States.<sup>19</sup> Smoking substantially increases the risk of death from heart disease, stroke, bronchitis, emphysema, and diabetes. Smoking also causes 87% of lung cancers and increases risk for other forms of cancer.<sup>20</sup> Approximately 30% of all cancer deaths each year are from lung cancer.<sup>21</sup> In addition, nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke at home or work have a 25 to 30% increased risk of developing heart disease and a 20 to 30% increased risk of developing lung cancer.<sup>22</sup> Children who live with smokers are more likely to have asthma and ear infections.<sup>23</sup>

According to the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, 28.9% of adults in Baltimore City smoke, the highest rate in the state.<sup>24</sup> Men in Baltimore are 1.8 times more likely to die of lung cancer than women.<sup>25</sup>

- Baltimore City residents who are ready to quit can obtain a health counselor by calling 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) (<http://www.smokingstopshere.com/>).

## 6. Know About How to Access Treatment for Addiction

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Drug use breaks up families, increases a person's risk of being the victim of violence, and causes health problems in the heart, lungs, kidney, and liver. Injection drug use can transmit HIV, syphilis, hepatitis, and other serious diseases.

Over 20,000 people receive drug treatment in Baltimore City each year. On any given day, Baltimore has over 7,000 treatment slots for the uninsured, covering needs including detoxification, residential, transitional, outpatient treatment, and methadone maintenance. Buprenorphine, a new medication to treat opioid dependence, can reduce harm and improve lives of those addicted to heroin.

- Baltimore Substance Abuse Systems 410-637-1900 (<http://www.bsasinc.org/>) takes calls from the public and arranges appointments for city residents in drug treatment.

### Notes

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