

Our Quality of Life
by K. Anoa Monsho

Community Co-chairs are planning a community meeting from 9:30 to noon on Saturday, October 22 at the Huston-Tillotson University chapel before the final presentation to the City Council.

We take it for granted that health is our greatest wealth...until we start having problems. When your sugar or blood pressure or cholesterol levels start rising - all aggravated by weight gain, smoking, drinking to excess and lack of exercise and good nutrition – it's past time to look at your health care options.

“What we know is that African Americans are dying at higher rates than any other ethnicity in Travis County in cancer, heart disease, diabetes, obesity related illnesses...ten of the fifteen leading causes of death. Think about it, ten of fifteen! That's completely alarming to me. When the community added health as a category for quality of life, we were looking for ways to reduce these unacceptable statistics. African Americans in Austin are in a full-blown healthcare crisis. All our recommendations are targeted to saving our lives,” said Joe Barnes, community co-chair for the health initiative.

It's true that, to a certain extent, each of us is responsible for the lifestyle choices we make, and those choices have a huge impact on whether or not we develop the so-called lifestyle diseases- cancer, Type 2 diabetes, some forms of hypertension, heart disease and stroke. But the information about how to live a healthy lifestyle has to be taught, so public health information is important. So is available and affordable medical care. For instance, if someone smokes, clear information has to be available about how smoking raises risk of lung cancer and many other cancers and heart disease. But there also has to be easy to access information about how to quit as well as access to the medications that increase the chances of staying quit. If someone has diabetes, they need to learn to eat well to support health, exercise to lose excess weight *and* have easy access to life saving medications. In terms of our health, access – as well as proactive self care – is key.

“Four of our nine recommendations deal with prevention,” said Barnes. “It's far easier to prevent disease than to treat it or cure it. Another four recommendations work to improve access to physicians and needed medications. Another emphasis is public education and outreach about the services that are available and the wellness and prevention practices that people can focus on to take their quality of life...and in my mind, there is no quality of life without health...into their own hands.”

Our Quality of Life will appear here weekly for the next several weeks. To stay informed on Quality of Life issues, tune in to KAZI 88.7 on Thursday mornings from 8 to 9 am. Information updates and timelines, as well as position papers and reports can be found at www.aaul.org/qualityoflife . Hard copies of the reports and updates are available at the NAACP, Urban League, ARA and Capital City Chamber of Commerce offices.
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presentation to the City Council. Writer K. Anoa Monsho serves on the Arts, Culture and Entertainment committee.