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Community Report Rates New York State Health Department D- for Diabetes Prevention and Care

Groups Stage Kneel-In to Protest State's Indifference as Diabetes Epidemic Escalates

NEW YORK, November 14, 2018 – On World Diabetes Day, November 14, South Bronx-based Health People: Community Preventative Health Institute hosted a “Kneel-In” at the New York State Department of Health’s New York City offices, protesting the state’s soaring caseload— which has now reached 1,529,719 cases—while the state Health Department has completely defunded technical and support services for more than 300 public, private, health and community-based partners who provide diabetes self-care and prevention education.

In light of New York State’s 1.5 million diagnosed cases of diabetes, its 48 percent increase in diabetes-related lower limb amputations, and the 114,000 new cases diagnosed in the state annually, the state’s failure to fund both proven preventive education and self-management programs shown to improve health outcomes and quality of life for adults living with diabetes has been devastating.

“Actually, the D- stands for devastating—and more than devastating,” said Chris Norwood, Executive Director of Health People, which issued the state report card. “The state’s refusal to even fund the Centers for Disease Control-approved National Diabetes Prevention program, which is shown to reduce by 58% the risk that pre-diabetics will develop diabetes, is simply an abandonment of public health.”

According to Rev. John Williams, President of New Creation Community Health Empowerment in Brooklyn, the rally co-sponsor “We are a church group and like many church groups all over

the state, we are providing our diabetes self-care courses with volunteers. We don't even get help to buy the educational materials. Obviously we can't pay for all this ourselves no matter how hard we try. Meanwhile we are looking at a horrendous diabetes epidemic in central Brooklyn. How many people does the state want to get diabetes? How many thousands more do they want on dialysis for diabetes-related kidney failure or in wheelchairs for their lost limbs?"

For the past two years, the state further undermined community efforts to fight diabetes by defunding QTAC, a technical assistance center that helped 300 health and community-based organizations with technical assistance, such as training and guidance to deliver their diabetes prevention and education courses.

Perhaps the worst consequence of the failure to provide self-management education is the state's soaring diabetes-related lower limb amputation rate—which has increased by 48 percent statewide since 2009.

"Every amputation is a failure of our care system. Let us not be accomplices, when we can act together with a loud voice. We can provide the care, together, to make such amputations an unpleasant memory of a time of indifference," said Robert Morrow, M.D., Associate Professor in the Department of Family and Social medicine at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine.

At the rally, Anthony 'Malik' Wright, himself a double diabetes amputee, spoke out "so that others will never have to go through what I've been through. I never received any real education about how to manage my diabetes. No one told me the horrors that could happen--- but certainly the doctors knew. I want to be sure that today, everyone with diabetes knows what they have to do for good control and good outcomes."

The percentage of diabetes patients in New York State who had access to even one class on self-management fell to 35 percent in 2015 from 52 percent in 2001.

"This is incomprehensible and frightening," Norwood added. "Good education has been proven over and over to work for diabetics and others with chronic disease. It really is as if the state closed down vaccinations for polio. The price in increased health costs---and human costs in crippled and disabled people---is incalculable and irresponsible."

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About Health People

Health People is a groundbreaking peer education, prevention and support organization in the South Bronx whose mission is to train and empower residents of communities overwhelmed by chronic disease and AIDS to become leaders and educators in effectively preventing ill health, hospitalization and unnecessary death.

Established in 1990 as a women's AIDS prevention and support program, Health People has grown, using its peer-education model, to provide a full range of HIV/AIDS services for men, women and families. It also has conducted community asthma programs, New York's first diabetes peer-educators program, and a community smoking cessation program. Health People's Junior Peer program, Kids-Helping-Kids includes teens who are mentors for younger children with sick or missing parents.

For more information, please visit www.healthpeople.org.

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