

# Health Disparities Advisory Meeting | MINUTES

April 11, 2024, | 1:00 P.M. – 2:00 P.M. | Location: Microsoft Teams

Meeting called by:	Division of Health Disparities Elimination	Approximately: 60 ppl.
Type of meeting:	Weekly Health Disparities Advisory Group Meeting	
Facilitator:	LaShan Dixon, Director Office of Faith-Based and Community Engagement	

**Motivational Quote:** (LaShan Dixon) “An inclusive initiative that address the health needs of African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Native American and other minorities. Its goal is to strengthen the capacity of local communities to eliminate the disproportionate burdens of premature death and preventable illness in minority populations through prevention, early detection, and control of disease complications.” - Unknown

(LaShan Dixon)

- **National Minority Health Month** is an annual observance that builds awareness about the health disparities that persist among racial and ethnic minority and American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) populations and encourages everyone to take action to end these inequities.

This year's theme, **Be the Source for Better Health: Improving Health Outcomes Through Our Cultures, Communities, and Connections**, is about understanding how the unique environments, cultures, histories, and circumstances (known as social determinants of health) of racial and ethnic minority and populations impact their overall health.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Office of Minority Health (OMH) is committed to working with public health and community-based partners to **Be the Source for Better Health** by providing quality, respectful care and services that are responsive to diverse cultural health beliefs and practices, preferred languages, economic and environmental circumstances, and health literacy levels. When patients are provided with culturally and linguistically appropriate information, they are better able to create healthier outcomes for themselves, their families, and their communities.

- **Women Eye Health and Safety Month** This observance is designed to raise awareness about women’s eye health, the importance of regular eye exams, and what can be done to help prevent vision loss. Vision impacts all aspects of life. Women have a higher risk of eye health and vision problems that can affect their quality of life, such as glaucoma and age-related macular degeneration, than men. Many eye diseases and conditions can be treated and possibly prevented if detected early. An eye doctor can also diagnose other health problems like high blood pressure and diabetes during a comprehensive eye exam. However, women often put themselves last when it comes to health care. Two-thirds of people with vision issues and blindness in the U.S. are women.

The good news is that nearly 80% of visual impairment in the U.S. and 25% of blindness can be treated or prevented. One of the main reasons women have more vision problems than men is because they typically live longer. Many vision issues occur with age, hormone fluctuations are another reason why women are more likely than men to develop vision issues. Hormone changes can occur during:

- **Pregnancy** – Fluid retention caused by hormone changes can lead to blurry vision during pregnancy. This and other pregnancy-related vision changes usually disappear after a woman gives birth.
- **Menopause** – Women also experience significant hormonal changes during menopause. Dry eye is common among peri- and postmenopausal women.

Other common eye conditions effecting women are:

- **Dry Eye Syndrome** – Symptoms include itching, burning, irritation, blurry vision, and sensitivity to light. Dry eye syndrome can damage the front of the eye and lead to vision impairment. Ha
- **Age-related Macular Degeneration (AMD)** – AMD is an eye condition that causes the loss of central vision. It's the most common cause of vision loss in people aged 50 and older.
- **Autoimmune Diseases** – Some autoimmune diseases can affect the eyes and cause eye problems, including lupus, thyroid eye disease, rheumatoid arthritis, and multiple sclerosis (MS).
- **Cataracts** – This clouding of the eye's natural lens can cause hazy or blurry vision.
- **Glaucoma** – is a disease that damages the optic nerve in the back of your eye. It's often called "the silent thief of sight" because there are no symptoms in its early stages.
- **Low Vision** – Low vision is a vision impairment that can't be completely corrected with glasses, surgery, or medical treatments.

Making your eye health a priority is the best way to protect your vision. Here are some habits that can help maintain your eye health and lower your risk of eye disease:

- **Get routine comprehensive eye exams** – Women ages 18 to 64 should have an eye exam at least every two years. If you're 65 and older, you should have an eye exam annually. Your eye doctor will tell you if need to be seen more often.
- **Eat a healthy diet** – Eat foods that are good for eye health, such as fish, lean meats, whole grains, brightly colored fruits, and dark leafy greens.
- **Stay active** – Exercise is a good way to keep your eyes healthy because it reduces your risk of diabetes and other health problems that can affect vision.
- **Wear sunglasses** – The sun emits ultraviolet (UV) rays that can damage your eyes even on cloudy days so wear sunglasses whenever you're outside. Make sure your sunglasses block 99% to 100% of UVA and UVB rays.
- **Use protective eyewear when needed** – Protective eyewear like safety glasses and goggles can help keep your eyes safe from potential dangers. They're good to wear when you play sports or work with hazardous materials, among other situations.

- **Quit smoking** – Smoking can damage your eyes and raise your risk for eye health problems such as age-related macular degeneration and cataracts.

Women often juggle many responsibilities, including work and caretaking, along with many other activities. Getting regular eye exams can help ensure your eyes are healthy and that you can see clearly. The investment in your health can pay off today and in the future.

- **National Youth HIV & AIDS Awareness Day** is observed on April 10<sup>th</sup> a day to raise awareness about the impact of HIV on our young people. Together, we can help young people stay healthy by encouraging HIV testing, prevention, and treatment. In the United States, 20% of our young people (aged 13-24) was diagnosed with human immunodeficiency virus or HIV in 2021. For youth who test negative, testing services can connect them to HIV prevention resources. Youth who test positive can be connected to health services and take medicine to treat HIV. Treating HIV means taking medicine to lower the amount of virus in the blood, so low that a test can't measure it. This is the best thing to do to stay healthy. Getting tested is key for prevention, and only 6% of high school students have ever been tested for HIV. If you would like more information or need testing information for Youth HIV & AIDS please contact [HIV Rapid Testing Locations in Tennessee](#).

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## TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

**Focus:** Southern Environmental Health Study

**Presenter:** Dr. Martha Shrubsole, Research Professor in Epidemiology at Vanderbilt University Medical Center

**Summary:** In this study, Dr. Shrubsole and the research team learned that cancer rates are typically higher in the U.S. South. In the great state of Tennessee, the Cancer Incidence Rate Map is broken down by counties and there are many areas with high neighborhood deprivation especially in the rural areas which shows a lot of dark red and dark orange in comparison to other parts of the country. In the South, there tends to be more common exposure such as air and water pollution, heat exposure and polyfluoroalkyl substances called “forever chemicals”.

Living in a disadvantage neighborhood has been linked to healthcare outcomes that includes diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Tennessee rural areas has a high Area Deprivation Index (ADI) which is multifaceted proxy measures for assessing socioeconomic disadvantage. When viewing the impact and challenges 80% of cancer is caused by environmental exposure, including lifestyle and other types of exposures and the interactions with the host susceptibility factors. There are over 250 substances identified as reasonably anticipated to cause cancer in humans, however EPA has registered 80,000 chemicals and mixtures.

So, the approach that's being taken within the Southern Environmental Health Study is within the research world called exposome that includes the ecosystems, lifestyle, social and physical-chemical an integrated function of exposure on the body, which basically, means there's multiple types of exposures at one time, which is what is thought about during cancer research and cancer prevention. The goal is to understand how environmental exposures as well as other factors may relate to our risk of future risk of cancer and other chronic diseases.

So, we systematically evaluate thousands of exposures using data from surveys and environmental monitoring, information like the EPA to see what's happened in the neighborhood folks live in. We're seeking more participation from adults between the ages of 40 -70, individuals living in southern US, if you like to join the Southern Environmental Health Study, please join at [SEHStudy.org](#).

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**Member Comments:** Announcements and Upcoming Events

- Kids and Kites Day, held on April 13 from 10AM – 2PM located at the Bicentennial Mall

- Meharry Medical College Cancer Survivorship Summit, held on April 13 from 8AM to 1PM
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**Resources mentioned during call:**

- **Health Council Community of Practice** Registration is now open for all Spring Summits. Join us for full day to network, share best practices, and develop skills to improve public health in your communities!!
  - **MIDDLE: Thursday, April 25<sup>th</sup>, in Lebanon, TN – [CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)**
  - **EAST: Thursday, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, in Knoxville, TN - [CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)**
- If you need more information, please visit our website at [www.healthdisparitiestn.com](http://www.healthdisparitiestn.com)

**Chat Box – links / website / events:**

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**Next Meeting: April 18, 2024, from 1pm-2pm via Microsoft Teams.**

**Microsoft Teams Meeting details are as follows:**

**Join on your computer or mobile app**

[Click here to join the meeting](#)

**Or call in (audio only)**

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Phone Conference ID: 641 975 577#