

Baltimore Becomes Host to the Nation's First "engAGE With Heart" Program

The novel program, built for and by the community, is organized by the Global Coalition on Aging with support from Novartis

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND, USA, October 29, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Today leaders from Baltimore joined with the Global Coalition on Aging (GCOA) to launch engAGE with Heart, a community health initiative dedicated to sustainable risk reduction, detection, and management of cardiovascular disease, starting with six community partners in East and West Baltimore. The program, supported by Novartis, focuses on sustainability and reducing health inequities through community-led programming including health education, healthy food, and preventive cardiovascular screening.



The program formally launched at Liberty Grace Church of God on October 29. The celebration included Mayor Brandon Scott, Sen. Ben Cardin, and other community leaders. The launch event included a church service, a discussion of the program, a meeting with program staff, and a shared meal among honored guests, program support, and church congregants.

"Informed by our past work during the COVID crisis, engAGE with Heart will allow us to build a lasting community health infrastructure from the inside out, reducing inequities and lowering healthcare costs," said Rev. Dr. Terris King, Sc.D, Pastor at Liberty Grace Church of God, former Senior Executive at the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, and advisor to the Moore-Miller Healthcare Transition team. "This program aligns perfectly with Governor Moore's focus on community health programs. It can play a key role creating access to Maryland's healthcare system among underserved populations."

"My administration has made tackling health inequities and overcoming the decades of disinvestment a top priority, and tackling the disproportionate impact of heart disease in our

communities is central to that work," said Mayor Brandon M. Scott. "We know that public health initiatives focused on equity and the specific needs of communities make a real impact, improving and even saving lives. That's why we're so proud to be working with initiatives like engAGE with Heart to ensure Baltimoreans of all walks of life have access to community-based public health outreach, so they can keep themselves and their loved ones healthy and informed on how to confront the danger of cardiovascular disease."

The impact of cardiovascular diseases, like heart attack, stroke, peripheral arterial disease, and high blood pressure, tends to increase with age. In Baltimore, it is the number one cause of mortality, [responsible](#) for more than 25 percent of all deaths. It's even worse for the city's Black residents. The average life [expectancy](#) of residents in the predominantly white (79.5%) neighborhood of Greater Roland Park is 83 – 20 years longer than the average life expectancy of residents in Black (94.3%), Druid Heights.

To counter this extreme disparity, engAGE with Heart offers free community-based screenings conducted by Johns Hopkins University School of Nursing students that will evaluate and provide education on cardiovascular health indicators. The program is supported by an advisory council of local and national healthcare, cardiovascular and public health experts. Additionally, it is partnering with the Black Church Food Security Network and Hungry Harvest to create a pipeline of fresh food, encourage healthy food decisions, and feature relevant healthy food demonstrations to promote nutritional resilience within the community. engAGE with Heart has already begun to employ and train Community Health Ambassadors recruited from within their communities to serve as a resource for their neighbors throughout the program.

"The Community Health Ambassador is the centerpiece of our program," said Michael Hodin, CEO of GCOA. "By training and deploying local, trusted advocates, health access can become more tangible for citizens who may not regularly interact with the formal healthcare system and who may also be suffering from or at risk of chronic conditions like cardiovascular diseases. Trusted neighbors trained by cardiovascular disease and Healthy Aging experts at the front line of prevention, earlier detection, and more effective adherence to treatments will improve Baltimore citizens' health while appreciably reducing the need for capacity-strained conventional health systems."

Local partners in the Baltimore engAGE With Heart program include four churches: Liberty Grace Church of God in Ashburton, The Lord's Church in Park Heights, Sweet Hope Free Will Baptist Church in Dolfield, and Mount Pleasant Development Corporation in Cedonia; and two senior centers run by the Baltimore City Health Department: Sandtown Winchester Senior Center in Sandtown-Winchester and Zeta Center for Healthy and Active Aging in Central Park Heights.

"Baltimore's leading cause of mortality isn't violence, drugs, or COVID; it's cardiovascular disease," said Heang Tan, Deputy Commissioner of the Baltimore City Health Department. "This serious health issue can be triggered by better known causes such as genetics, an unhealthy diet, tobacco use, alcohol abuse, a sedentary lifestyle, or a combination of these factors. But

excessive stress—including the emotional weight of structural and systemic racism—can also cause cardiovascular issues. Initiatives like engAGE with Heart employ a community-based approach to assist older adults in recognizing and managing cardiovascular disease, or better yet, preventing it altogether.”

For more images of the launch event, please go to: <https://bit.ly/3SaWVis>

For more information about engAGE with Heart program, please go to:

<https://engagewithheart.org/>

About engAGE with Heart

engAGE with Heart is a program developed with and for the communities of Baltimore. It brings together families, churches, senior centers, and more, all from Baltimore, to support the community’s collective cardiovascular health and create a community in which cardiovascular disease and its consequences are no longer a burden.

About the Global Coalition on Aging

The Global Coalition on Aging aims to reshape how global leaders approach and prepare for the 21st century’s profound shift in population aging. GCOA uniquely brings together global corporations across industry sectors with common strategic interests in aging populations, a comprehensive and systemic understanding of aging, and an optimistic view of its impact. Through research, public policy analysis, advocacy, and strategic communications, GCOA is advancing innovative solutions and working to ensure global aging is a path for fiscally sustainable economic growth, social value creation and wealth enhancement. For more information, visit: www.globalcoalitiononaging.com

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