

# Vascular Dementia Inequalities for Lambeth's Black Communities

In October 2020, we held an online event with [South London and Maudsley Trust \(SLaM\)](#) and [Black Thrive](#) for local people to explore the inequalities linked to [vascular dementia](#) experienced by Lambeth's Black communities.

## The inequalities

SLaM has identified that local people of African and Caribbean heritage:

- risk developing the disease up to 10 years earlier than other people
- are diagnosed at a later stage compared with other people
- may encounter cultural bias in the diagnostic tools which could delay their diagnosis further.

## The event

### Aims

The event aimed to offer an initial conversation with some of Lambeth's Black community members to:

- get a sense of awareness levels about these inequalities
- start to investigate the reasons for the pattern of late diagnoses
- provide information about the healthy living support that can help to prevent and delay the disease, and explore how accessible and effective these initiatives are for local Black communities
- identify some ideas for responding to these challenges.

### Programme

Watch the presentation from Grant Malyn, Dementia Clinical Nurse Specialist at SLaM, explaining what vascular dementia is and how they discovered the inequalities:

[Watch the video here](#)

Watch the presentation from David Truswell, Executive Director of [the Dementia Alliance for Culture and Ethnicity](#) about some of the wider implications for people living with dementia from BAME communities:

[Watch the video here](#)

### Community drama performance

The event also included a live play about a Caribbean family's different responses to a family member experiencing memory problems and confusion. The play, commissioned by Healthwatch, was developed and performed by local community members and directed by [Tony Cealy](#).

## What we learned

Over 50 people attended the event and around 30 people were involved in the drama project. Through these activities we learned:

### Awareness levels

Most participants knew something about vascular dementia but few were aware of the associated inequalities faced by people of African and Caribbean heritage.

### Reasons for late diagnosis

- Participants felt that a trusted relationship with GPs is critical, as GPs provide the main referral route to the Memory Service for an assessment, particularly:
  - Continuity of care is important to spot changes in patient memory or behaviour, as well as knowledge of family history
  - Some participant experiences of GPs who were slow or even reluctant to make a referral may point to unconscious bias and the need for better training
  - Patients should feel empowered to ask for and receive appropriate care and have a share in related decisions
  - There should be better signposting from GPs to patient information about the range of preventative support available.
  - Grouping the memory service with other mental health services (either through shared physical location or branding) may create a barrier for some members of the Black community because of the wider mistrust of mental health provision linked to related systemic inequalities.
  - Through the play, performers highlighted that memory loss and behaviour change is often viewed as a natural part of the ageing process and care for people living with dementia may be seen as a family responsibility.

### Access to preventative healthy living support

- Participants recognised the importance of maintaining their mental health and general wellbeing to help manage stress levels and support lower blood pressure.
- The impact of structural racism on stress levels and other long-term health conditions within the Black community must be acknowledged when exploring solutions.
- A wide range of concerns and ideas about diet were shared, including:
  - Food poverty and the inter-connectedness of wider socio-economic inequalities
  - The value of food-growing projects to help people develop healthy eating habits
  - The role of neighbourhood planning for example in limiting the number of fast-food outlets and increasing and sustaining food-growing spaces
  - The need for better nutritional information including for supplements such as vitamin D and healthy versions of traditional recipes.

## Ideas for action

Participants suggested:

- More community awareness-raising about the inequalities, including:
  - opportunities for local people to become involved
  - information about comparative studies on vascular dementia in Africa and the Caribbean, to help people understand how widespread the disease is
  - more information on the links between vascular dementia and other conditions such as heart disease and diabetes
- Support existing healthy eating and food-growing initiatives to become more joined-up, sustainable, and inter-generational.
- Invite community members to co-produce healthy versions of traditional recipes with nutritionists
- Develop a healthy living campaign targeting black men.

## Next steps

We will:

- Share these insights with the [Lambeth Dementia Action Alliance](#) and other health and care practitioners
- Organise a community information session about local healthy living support
- Explore ideas for further community awareness-raising.