

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.