

# African Community Health Initiatives

"That is one of the things ACHI can provide that other organizations can't. They will trust people that look like them, and they will trust people who can relate to their experience."



## MISSION

ACHI's mission is to support and improve the health of Africans living in Massachusetts by promoting access to quality culturally competent health and social services through education, research and community partnerships.

Towards the fulfillment of this mission, we implement multiple programs including the Early Intervention program, through which we identify and assess the needs of clients and connect them to medical care and social services; a Health Ambassador program, through which we connect clients who have chronic diseases to more resources in their communities and increase their ability to effectively manage their conditions. We also help clients with enrollment in MassHealth, care coordination, early intervention, and other community outreach.

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Kwame, a Health System Navigator helping clients fill out CDC demographic

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# An Intern's Perspective

Interviewer: Chimieze Udozorh, HCC Intern

Interviewee: Bele Wariboko, Summer Intern



**Q:** Tell me a little about yourself and your background?

**A:** My name is Bele Wariboko and I am a student at the University of Pittsburgh. I have interned for ACHI for two summers now.

**Q:** How did you first get involved in ACHI?

**A:** I first got involved with ACHI the summer after my first year of college. With me planning to enter into healthcare in the future, I thought it would provide good experience with a different aspect of healthcare.

**Q:** What makes ACHI different from other organizations?

**A:** ACHI is different from other organization because of where our focus is. Our target demographic is Africans within Massachusetts. That targeted focus on one group of people tailors help to match the needs of the people. Also, I feel due to the small size of our organization we can provide personalized help. Making connections and building a rapport with our clients help them feel more comfortable. They are not just a number in a system they are a name with a face and we are not just an automated voice system, we are people that you can make a connection and hopefully trust to help you with your needs.

**Q:** Where do you see ACHI in 10 years?

**A:** I see ACHI having more programs that may move beyond just health. Right now, though ACHI's primary goal is to help Africans with health services, we do help with other things like food assistance and housing. I hope that ACHI can expand to cater to its client's general wellness and not just health.

## What ACHI is Currently Doing

ACHI implements an Early Intervention program, participates in the implementation of CDC's Care Coordination program, and assists people with access to social services and enrollment into health insurance programs.

Under contract with the Department of Public Health, ACHI is one of the community based organizations that educate the community on colorectal, cervical and breast cancer, with focus on the prevention, risk factors, symptoms, screening methods, and the importance of screening. In partnership with area hospitals, ACHI ensures that the participants are referred for screening and are paired with providers for services. Through this CDC Care Coordination program, ACHI aims to decrease the disparities in mortality and morbidity rates in the various communities. Participants are reached through churches, mosques, community organizations, and community gatherings.

ACHI continues to implement its Early Intervention program through which people of African descent are reached, have their needs assessed, and are referred to ACHI's partners for health and social services. As an educational component of this program, ACHI partnered with MIT's Africa Kabisa Radio and an Ethiopian Radio station to educate the public through various Public Service Announcements (PSAs). Recent PSAs focused on asthma, different types of cancer, and cardiovascular diseases. In the fall of 2013, ACHI conducted focus groups on how African immigrants are affected by trauma, in partnership with Boston University Medical School. This project has a continuing effect on the study of trauma among African immigrants. ACHI continues to conduct and participate in community-wide health fairs.

ACHI is a Certified Application Counselor organization. As a result, we continue to assist people with enrollment into MassHealth and other health insurance plans. People are helped to determine and enroll in the plans that best meet their needs. We educate the community about the changes in health insurance programs, such as the Affordable Care Act and its implementation in Massachusetts.

ACHI also assists people with enrollment into SNAP and WIC through the virtual gateway. Furthermore, some clients are assisted with housing and job search by connecting them with organizations that provide housing and job placement services.



ACHI's Health System Navigator Jennifer providing cancer prevention instructions

ACHI is a unique organization that can provide personalized care.

"Culturally-sensitive service is one of the things ACHI can provide to the African community that other organizations can't. Our target population trusts people that not only look like them but can also relate to their experience. They find ACHI's ability to help them connect to health and social services, including taking them to receive care, very comforting and assuring. Some of them who come from repressive regimes are weary about relating to strangers. ACHI overcomes these barriers by creating rapport so they can speak freely. Thus, we are able to assess their needs and help them."

- Dr. Anne Medinus

Interviewer: Emmanuel (Kwame) Bidi

Interviewee: Getachew Meker

**Q: Tell me a little about yourself and your background?**

**A:** My name is Getachew Meker. I came from Ethiopia and I've been here almost 20 years in America. I didn't know about this organization, I just found out it was 14 years old already. If I had known 14 years ago, I can use this opportunity when I came to America when I didn't know where to go or who to ask to find out.



**Q: How did you first hear about ACHI?**

**A:** Actually, I first hear about ACHI when a girl on your staff, Sara, came to our church, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, 4 weeks ago. She introduced this program to some of my members. She tried to help all the people there. ACHI came with the forms to sign up anyone who needed help, if they needed health care and assistance, she tried to help them. She mentioned to me that she can help all people and people who need help, it's an African Organization. I said Ok. Most of them, they don't know about this kind of help. Normally we— Our people are.... Naturally Ethiopians they are shy, and very shy to get that kind of help.

**Q: Tell us about your sister and her housing Situation.**

**A:** My sister is almost 7 years here in America. Last 5 years she stayed with me and after that she had to find her own way because I have 4 kids I take care of, and I can't

accommodate her to stay with me. She got assistance from the city and with that money she can rent an apartment. But that money is only for food and she can't use it to pay her rent. She was having problems being approved with Boston housing with her condition. She

applied 2 years ago, almost 3 year, but Boston housing always asking her to bring that— to bring the evidence, to bring the bank statement to bring the doctors note and when she bring them she is always denied. That's the problem and she was frustrated.

**Q: How did ACHI help you and what impact has that has on you?**

**A:** I asked Sara if she could help my sister. I told her that she needs housing and she has this problem for 2 years. So, she made an appointment with ACHI and I came the following Monday. ACHI helped me figure out a way to help my sister.

**Q: Would you recommend ACHI to friends and family?**

**A:** Yes, sure of course. We need this kind of service. We need it because we don't know what kind of American opportunities we have lost because we didn't know about them. There is help but we just don't know about them.

## Thoughts from a Board Member

Interviewer: Chimezie Udozorh

Interviewee: Wilner Borgella

### **1. Tell me a little about yourself and your background.**

I am a Board member as well as the Treasurer of ACHI. I have been an ACHI member and supporter for approximately 10 years and have served as Treasurer for the last few years. I am an attorney by profession and have many years of federal, state and private practice experience in business, consumer and health care law and related regulatory matters.



### **2. What makes ACHI different from other organizations? What makes it special?**

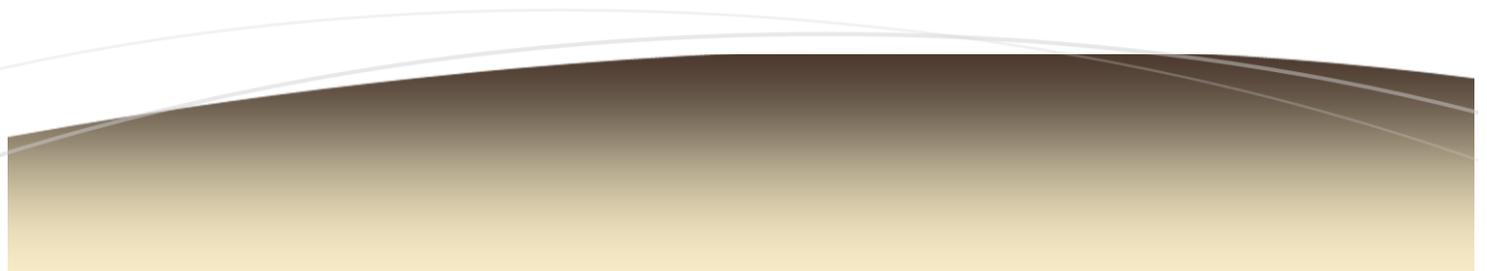
What I value and appreciate the most about ACHI is its choice of target population together with the extra steps ACHI takes to ensure it meets the needs of that population. Africans living in Massachusetts include some on the most vulnerable, underserved and often hard-to-reach members of our society. These individuals and families, whether new or seasoned immigrants, pose unique challenges because of the wide range of countries from which they emigrate, the many languages spoken, and the diversity of cultural traditions and beliefs. Further, some individuals and families arriving as refugees often are fleeing violence and persecution and may display distrust and fear towards the strangers they encounter, especially with respect to government and authority figures, thereby limiting their access to information and assistance. In short, starting anew in another country where the language, culture, environment and overall way of life is substantially different from one's own can be quite daunting. ACHI has risen to the occasion and has labored tirelessly and endlessly to assist this population. Indeed, there are countless stories about ACHI staff (1) meeting clients at their homes and accompanying them to hospitals and clinics or conversely meeting clients at the lobbies of hospitals and clinics to ensure appointments are kept and thus facilitate access to health care and follow-up care; (2) reviewing, translating and clarifying health benefit notices for clients and assisting with the submission of required paperwork and documents to help reduce disenrollment and insurance churn; (3) contacting partner organizations that render specialized services (e.g., immigration/visa services; housing services; tax preparation; etc.) on behalf of clients to connect clients with the assistance they need; (4) referring and if necessary, bringing, family members to state agency offices to apply for SNAP, WIC, TAFDC benefits upon learning of a client's food or financial crisis or apparent eligibility for such benefits; (5) serving upon a client's request as a bridge or conduit between clients and health care providers to promote culturally competent care during medical appointments; and (6) approaching churches, community events, residential complex meetings and other gatherings in order to promote cancer screenings in connection with its cancer prevention outreach efforts. In my opinion, these efforts and actions make ACHI a very unique and special organization.

### **3. Where do you see ACHI in 10 years?**

In the many years to come, I see ACHI remaining a steady and sturdy lifeline responding to the needs of Africans and other individuals and families in the Commonwealth. As ACHI reaches out to individuals and families to help them obtain medical and social services, more people are coming forward seeking ACHI's assistance given its positive and proven track record. As the demand for ACHI's assistance increases, ACHI will continue to turn to its members, partners, supporters and friends whose donations (financial and in-kind), volunteer efforts, internships and course credit arrangements, space and meeting room contributions and other acts of generosity and support allow ACHI to continue to lend a helping hand to a growing number of Commonwealth residents seeking help.

### **4. What impact has ACHI had in the community?**

ACHI's numerous client testimonials tell very heart-felt stories of clients needing and receiving help from the organization. Similarly, the thank-you cards as well as the face-to-face and telephone communications of thanks all paint a rosy picture of very grateful and satisfied recipients of ACHI services. Further, citations and/or certificates of recognition and appreciation from the Governor's Office, the Commonwealth Senate Office, Health Care for All, and the Secretary of Health and Human Services all speak volumes of the good work ACHI renders on behalf of Commonwealth residents. Specifically, ACHI has helped Africans and other individuals and families in the Commonwealth obtain health care benefits including vision and dental care; access medical care and social services at area hospitals and community health centers; manage chronic conditions through community based programs and resources; obtain food and nutritional assistance; and secure shelter and housing services. ACHI's services are vital and impact the entire Commonwealth as these individuals and families often are our co-workers, classmates, friends, acquaintances, retail sales clerks, hospitality workers, child care providers, retail security personnel; maintenance workers, teacher's aides, and oftentimes, our very neighbors. When individuals and families can sleep at night because their illness or medical condition is being treated or managed because of ACHI's assistance; when children and adults don't go hungry or live on the streets or in crowded extended household conditions because of the SNAP, WIC, TAFDC benefits or shelter and housing assistance that ACHI facilitated; when individuals and families receive jobs because of employment assistance (including help filling out applications and writing resumes) rendered by ACHI; when sick individuals and families that are less likely or unlikely to seek health care assistance from government figures and authorities obtain help from ACHI as an intermediary linking them to health care benefits and access to medical treatment, the Commonwealth benefits as a whole and ACHI takes comfort in knowing that its hard work and dedication is paying off in fulfillment of its mission. At such times, undoubtedly, ACHI's motto of "Healthy Neighbors...Healthy Community" rings loud and clear and speaks volumes.



# Healthy People Health Community Banquet

On Saturday July 26, 2014, ACHI held a fundraising banquet at the Dante Alighieri Society Italian Cultural Center. The night was filled with good food, live performances, and a speech from our honored guest Joan Whitaker, the Director of Health Services at the Action for Boston community Development.

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Dr. Medinus presenting an Appreciation Award to Joan Whitaker, Director of Health Services, Action for Boston Community Development.



Kwame and Daisy  
Emcees for the night hosting  
the banquet



Some guests at the banquet



Guests dancing at the banquet



Joan Whitaker and Roxanne  
Reddington