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Barbershops, churches in Inland Empire Black community get blood pressure machines

New initiative aims to check for symptom-less condition in settings beyond the doctor's office



Owner Raymond Aldridge checks the blood pressure of George Rencher, a 55-year-old Lake Elsinore resident, before a Thursday, Feb. 23, 2023, haircut at Nappy Roots Barber Salon in Riverside. The nonprofit Healthy Heart Nation's Pressure Project puts blood pressure machines in Black barbershops and churches across the Inland Empire in hopes of improving health outcomes. (Photo by Watchara Phomicinda, The Press-Enterprise/SCNG)



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A barber for about 30 years, Raymond Aldridge, who owns Nappy Roots Barber Salon in Riverside, is now offering something beyond a good haircut.

He's offering clients a chance to check their blood pressure — a condition that impacts Black residents five times more than White residents.

Aldridge is one of a handful of Inland Empire barbershop owners partnering with the nonprofit [Healthy Heart Nation](#), which provides resources and education in African American communities. It launched the Pressure Project in February, during Black History Month.

The initiative will place blood-pressure machines inside Inland churches and Black-owned barber shops so employees can use them with their clientele. The program is also training barbershop staffs to use the machines and to suggest online education, nutritional tips and local resources.

“I wanted to give back to the community,” Aldridge said. “I wanted to be a part of this. Giving back is everything.”

On Thursday Feb, 23, Justin Daily, 44, sat in Aldridge's chair.

A nursing student who lives in Riverside County, Daily took advantage of the machine standing near the barber's chair and measured his blood pressure.

George Rencher, 55, took the next chair and also had Aldridge take his blood pressure.

“It's a great idea because you know people don't always go to the doctor's office and you're making it more common,” said Rencher, who lives in Lake Elsinore.

Inland barbershops receiving a machine also include Authentic Cutz Barber Shop in Moreno Valley and Thee Latest Barbershop in Rancho Cucamonga.

Two Riverside churches — Mt. Rubidoux Seventh-day Adventist Church, at 5320 Victoria Ave., and Kansas Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church, at 4491 Kansas

Additionally, Healthy Heart Nation has an online tool that aids in healthy eating called [Diet ID](#), a [YouTube](#) channel and blood-pressure fact sheets from the [American Heart Association](#).

High blood pressure, or hypertension, measures the pressure of blood pushing against artery walls, a [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) webpage states. It can be caused by a lack of physical activity or an unhealthy diet. Other factors, such as diabetes and obesity, can increase the risk of having high blood pressure. High blood pressure can lead to other health problems, such as heart disease, heart attack and stroke, according to the CDC.

Mario Sims, a UC Riverside social medicine, population and public health professor, called placing blood pressure machines and offering education in barbershops a step in the right direction.

“It gives people, the customers, a hands-on look at, you know, the importance of blood pressure, how to read it, the systolic and the diastolic and things like that,” Sims said.

A [2021 study on racial disparities in the U.S. from 2013 to 2018](#) found that Black men and women are at a higher risk of higher hypertension and are five times more at risk of death from hypertension compared to White people.

Though there is no clear answer to why Black communities face a greater risk of high blood pressure, Sims pointed to social conditions, inaccessibility of health services, poverty and political apathy.

“It’s a part of the system, which is a system that is built on those sorts of racial inequities, or discriminations that result in inequities in care and inequities in treatment and inequities in death and inequities in maternal, infant child health issues and mortality, things like that,” Sims said.

On Saturday, Feb. 18, barbers, Loma Linda Academy Black Student Movement students, nursing students and volunteers were trained to use the machines at the [Kansas Avenue Seventh-day Adventist Church](#) on Riverside’s Eastside. After the training, the machine remained at the church and was ready for use by church and community members, said April Rushing, a spokesperson for Healthy Heart Nation.

Tim Stansell, owner of Thee Latest Barbershop, said he tries to help his

“I think a lot of us need to get our blood pressures checked,” Stansell said. “I just think it would be an excellent place to set up, and you know, potentially save lives – especially in places where men congregate at.”

Stansell said he’s proud to be part of the project and understands the importance of health screening accessibility. He hopes to see more barbershops and beauty salons on board.

“I would like to assist with getting this information to several other barbershops, I’m in contact with a lot of owners,” he said. “So, I would just think that it would be very important for a lot of those shops, salons that don’t have this ... that they at least get the information or be aware of it.”

Though high blood pressure has no symptoms, regular testing is recommended, the [CDC](#) states.

The project is still in its first phase, Rushing said.

Barbershops, beauty salons and churches in California with connections to the African American community are invited to participate by contacting Danette Batiste at danette.batiste@myhhn.org, Rushing said.

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