

A Life Dedicated to Those Most Vulnerable

A SALUTE FOR MINORITY HEALTH MONTH



Bashir Easter MBA, PhD
Assistant Director, University of Wisconsin All of Us Research Program at the Center for Community Engagement and Health Partnerships in Milwaukee

During April, we're bringing awareness to Minority Health Month and those leaders who bring awareness and support to our most vulnerable communities. Bashir Easter has dedicated his professional career to dementia care and health research. We salute his endeavors to support families in Wisconsin.

A Pioneer in Dementia Care

Easter was the original (and first black male) Dementia Care Specialist (DCS) in Milwaukee County for the Milwaukee County Department on Aging for five years. The DCS program, a part of the ADRC, supports people with dementia and their caregivers to ensure the highest quality of life possible while living at home. As a DCS, he developed referral relationships with health care providers, and provided dementia-related consultations with families with cognitive concerns. In his role, he also developed a strategic plan including Milwaukee County's Approach to Building Dementia Capable/Friendly Communities. This led to the first-in-the-nation "Memory Connection Centers," which helps caregivers of those with dementia navigate services and support.



Easter and his mother.

His role in dementia care had a personal connection as well. "My mother started showing signs of dementia at the age of 50," Easter said. "At the time, we had no idea what was going on and there was no information about her diagnosis. She was officially diagnosed at the age of 55. It's difficult for a family to understand and cope without any information, resources or support. Later in my career, when I joined the Milwaukee County Department on Aging, I learned about all the services available to families on their journey. During my career, it was important that I make sure dementia resources were readily known to families."

A Holistic View of Health

Easter is currently the Assistant Director at the University of Wisconsin All of Us Research Program at the Center for Community Engagement and Health Partnerships in Milwaukee. The program is an effort to gather health data from one million or more people living in the U.S. to accelerate research that may improve health. The program, from the National Institutes of Health (NIH), collects information about health, habits and what it's like where people live. By looking at patterns, researchers will learn more about what affects people's health. To learn more about the program visit: allofus.nih.gov

"This is a different way of thinking about health – it's a holistic view," Easter said. "The program has a lot to offer participants. In addition to getting back some baseline health and ancestry data, participants are made aware of services in the community that can support their health."

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“We also strive to make sure this program is inclusive to all communities,” Easter said. “People of color have historically had trust issues with research, dating back to the study of syphilis in black men (the Tuskegee experiment where no informed consent was received). We are trying to overcome this with transparent information and *inviting* participants. We’re very proud that at this time, 57% of the participants are from underrepresented communities.”

“This program looks at a holistic view and helps individuals have a better understanding of their health,” Easter said. “We know that untreated health issues can have an impact on brain health and heart health, so a greater understanding of individual health issues has larger implications.”

Easter earned his Doctor of Philosophy from Capella University in Multidisciplinary Human Service. His dissertational research was, “African American adolescents’ experiences caring for a relative with dementia: a qualitative study.” He is a Member of the Wisconsin Alzheimer’s Institute Community Advisory Board and is the recipient of the Best Practice for Dementia Caring Communities Award and the Milwaukee Times Black Excellence Award.

