

Barbershops are more than just a place to get a haircut.

By Supervisor David J. Canepa

For many men, going to a barbershop means adopting a sort of brotherhood. Taking on a relationship akin to therapists and their patients, barbers and their clients forge a bond of trust with one another. With this trust comes a willingness to talk freely about anything, ranging from relationships to sports, work, or whatever they want.

But one thing that men often don't talk about, in general or to their barbers, is their health.

According to a national survey conducted by the Cleveland Clinic which was published last year, men just don't talk about their health. Of the 500 men polled, only two-in-five men have one person they can talk to about private issues, like health.

Additionally, only three-in-five men go to the doctor for a yearly check-up, and one of the reasons men do end up going to the doctor's office, according to the survey, is so a loved one would stop nagging them to go.

When it comes to knowing the correct ages of when to be screened for various health conditions, there isn't much change. Only 15 percent of Millennials knew to get tested for colon or rectal cancer at age 50 or older. And although the American Heart Association recommends blood pressure screenings at the age of 20, men on average believe they should start being screened at 35.

The reasons why men aren't open to talking about their health to friends cannot be explained easily. According to the survey, two-in-five believe that it isn't their friend's business to know. Another reason could be that talking about health can make them feel vulnerable and maintaining an image of masculinity is important in

a social context. Whatever reason men have as to why they don't talk about their health is too varied and personal to generalize, but what is clear is that it is happening, or more accurately, not happening.

In cities across the country, including the Bay Area, there have been organizations that have successfully used barbershops to host events dedicated to preventative health education and screenings. The barbershop, in particular, is an effective place to embed a health care outreach program because it is already an established place of unity and trust. In other words, it doesn't carry with it the anxiety and uncomfortable feelings that many people associate with the place where health talks normally occur: the doctor's office.

In the spirit of believing that prevention is better than treatment, we want to bring this type of educational outreach to the thriving barbershop community in Daly City and North San Mateo County. In collaboration with the Daly City Youth Health Center and the Black & Gold Barber Lounge, I will be holding an event on Saturday, November 18 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. where we will provide resources and opportunities for the men in our community to learn about how they can responsibly take charge of their own health.

By implementing this barbershop health outreach model, our goal is to encourage men to look past the stigma of talking about their health by introducing it in an environment that is familiar and comfortable. But ultimately, we hope to show men that their health isn't something to be ignored.

San Mateo County Supervisor David J. Canepa serves District 5 which includes the cities of Daly City, Colma, Brisbane, portions of South San Francisco and San Bruno and the unincorporated Broadmoor Village.

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