

## **Harlem Business Wellness Initiative Improves Health of Harlem Employees**

On Thursday, September 28, the lobby of the New York City Mission Society's Minisink Townhouse in Central Harlem buzzed with members of the Harlem Business Wellness Initiative (HBWI) and partnering healthcare professionals who had gathered to call attention to the many employees of small Harlem businesses with little or no healthcare.

HBWI's mobile team of health educators came equipped with pedometers, smoking cessation products, blood pressure equipment, and a weight scale to conduct one-on-one health assessments of Minisink Townhouse employees interested in decreasing their health risk factors. The mobile team has been offering health services, education, and medical referrals to small businesses in Harlem since the spring of 2006.

The Wellness Initiative, which is funded by a grant from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, is the first worksite health promotion program for small businesses using a mobile team approach. Peter Messeri, PhD, deputy department chair of the Department of Sociomedical Sciences and the program's principal investigator, explained, "The project is based on widely publicized research illustrating that worksite health programs result in less absenteeism and reduced costs for health insurance. By developing a viable and cost-effective strategy to link existing healthcare providers and programs within the community to small business employees, the HBWI is creating a model for health departments and other healthcare organizations to follow."

Community partnership is central to the success of the Wellness Initiative. Investigators from the School collaborate with physicians and health educators from Harlem Health Center and the Renaissance Healthcare Network, and a committee of Harlem business owners has participated in the design of the project and helps recruit new businesses to the Initiative. HBWI also worked closely with the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in the development of its preventive services recommendations.

Participating establishments include delis, beauty salons, barber shops, art galleries, and social service organizations that learn about the program via recruitment letters and door-to-door solicitation. María Cabán, HBWI's project manager, explained that the program targets businesses with anywhere from a hand-full of employees to as many as 30 people. The reactions from owners and employees of the businesses have been extremely favorable.