

Black Minds Matter

Baltimore Rising: Summoning the Village

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Baltimore Rising: Summoning the Village Call to Action Series was conceived and implemented July 2015 through June 2016 as a result of two Calls to Action meetings convened by the Black Mental Health Alliance immediately following the 2015 Baltimore uprisings as a result of the death of Freddie Gray. This series was an innovative and inclusive approach to community engagement and change guided by the wisdom of national thought leaders, researchers, scholars and local experts on many of the social conditions impacting one's mental health. The involvement of people from all walks of life, ensures that the recommendations that arose from the series were shaped by and therefore relevant and valuable to the impacted communities.

This seminal work toward healing acknowledges the historical trauma and stress that black people experience on a daily basis and explores how it affects their feelings, thinking and actions with the goal of crafting a solutions-focused model of prevention, treatment, sustainability, and replicability. The series was a natural extension of the over three decades of history of the Black Mental Health Alliance in addressing the mental health needs of Baltimore's communities.

Behavioral Health: The Many Pathways to Recovery

The BMHA will highlight and support programs and policies that have a replicable, scaled eco-system approach to comprehensive integrated primary care, addiction care and behavioral healthcare connecting patients and families to the community and community social services.

Recommendations

- Counter policies that criminalize drug use in African American communities versus treating it as a public health issue.
- Provide a trusted forum for behavioral health and healthcare providers to share and provide solutions on substance use prevention and abuse, especially the opioid and heroin epidemic.
- Advocate for the continuation of Medicaid coverage for basic mental-health and addiction services in any public policy initiative for universal healthcare coverage.
- Offer a platform to publish research and articles written by culturally competent behavioral health clinicians-beyond the academic and research silos--regarding the chemistry of drug use unique to those of African descent and treatments that have high success rates among African American communities.
- Provide African American children, youth and parents with substance use prevention education in a community setting with engaging and creative activities.
- Recognize that "timing" is of critical importance to each and every opportunity to engage opioid addicted individuals who are ready for treatment.
- Advocate for policy that addresses breaking the cycle of the nexus between opioid and "other" additions' impact on the community, family and untreated toxic stress on the children.

Picture a World: A Family's Legacy of Transformation and Social Justice

The BMHA will highlight and support programs and policies that promote a heightened sense of consciousness and being "WOKE" and that incorporate the psychological, spiritual and intellectual tools to empower each generation to prepare for activism and advocacy to confront personal injustices and on behalf of marginalized communities.

Recommendations

- Offer self-care opportunities, such as healing spaces, for social justice activists so that they can step away from the constant bombardment of negative news and information.
- Take the steps to keep stress from turning into depression and anxiety by being proactive, tuning into your emotions, practicing positive self-talk, setting boundaries, making time for yourself, and engaging in spiritual practices that you find beneficial.
- Gain financial self-sufficiency to invest in community development, institutions, and businesses so that there is an economic infrastructure within African American communities which then goes hand-in-hand with political power.
- Remain engaged in the political process; voting and activism.
- Operate in activism with a sense of intentionality which means to act with purpose, have a goal in mind, and put together a plan to achieve said goal.
- Foster an attitude of self-efficacy among young people in which they believe they can achieve success by believing in themselves. This belief is rooted in having a positive cultural self-identity and being surrounded by a village that affirms, on a daily basis, that they are invaluable on a daily basis.

Get Ready for the Revolution: Black Women Taking Charge of Our Emotional and Physical Health

The BMHA will highlight and support programs and policies, which promote the irrefutable fact that our mental and emotional well-being is inextricably tied to our physical health and both, are part and parcel of defining our overall health status.

Recommendations

- Prioritize your health first. Identify a primary care physician and healthcare team to schedule wellness examinations and screenings and to manage your stress.
- Engage in regular physical activity on most days.
- Discover eating well - with healthy recipes, healthy eating, healthy cooking.
- Create or attend women centered focus groups (healing circles) to freely discuss historical and race based trauma, explore behavioral and physical health issues and receive referrals to culturally competent health care providers.
- Be intentional about personal well-being by planning at least 2 weeks out of the year solely for spiritual and physical healing. During this time take a vacation, eat well, visit physicians for wellness checks, counsel with a therapist, and be peaceful.

Other People's Children

The Impact of Cultural Conflict in the Classroom

The BMHA will highlight and support programs and policies that consider public education for children of color through an equity lens, challenge stereotype threats and provide each student with the level of resources needed, both human and fiscal, to feel valued, challenged and that higher educational achievement is attainable.

Recommendations

- Identify strategies to reduce the "stereotype threat" so that academic performance improves among students of color.
- Foster an attitude that students deserve equitable access to an engaging and rigorous curriculum.
- Advocate for culturally and economically inclusive classrooms that consider the power of race, culture, and economic status in how students construct meaning and that support students in multiple ways.

Liberation from Mental Slavery through Emotional Emancipation

The BMHA will advocate for programs and policies that address the needs of African-Americans to acknowledge and reflect the impact of historical and structural race-based forces on their emotional lives, their relationships,

and their communities, which has caused multi-generational trauma, continued racism, dehumanization and unmitigated racial stress.

Recommendations

- Promote African-centered models of treatment, healing practices and self-help support groups that are psychologically sound and culturally grounded that will help members of the African American community work together to overcome, heal from and overturn the lies of white superiority and “black inferiority.”
- Develop a “communal process,” where there’s a focus on increasing and improving African Americans’ sense of their relationships to each other and provide safe spaces for Black people to come together to process the emotional legacies of enslavement and anti-Black trauma with the intention to foster individual, family and collective healing.
- Provide African American children, youth and parents with an empowerment process that will allow them to examine, understand and adopt various coping and survival adaptation strategies, among them, Emotional Emancipation Circles, to resist and repudiate the deleterious psychological effects of race-based trauma and move them to new levels of activism, family strengthening and community building.

The Determinants of Urban Health Equity: Social and Economic

The BMHA will highlight and support programs and policies that will lead to increased economic empowerment and employment opportunities and are in alignment with enhancing the physical and mental health and well-being of every person living in African American communities.

Recommendations

- Advocate for the equal distribution of power, status, and resources that impact African American’s freedom to lead lives they have reason to value, to take control of their lives, and to participate in the decisions that affect their lives, including their health.
- Increase the building of physical structures that contribute to individual and community empowerment that are fundamental to health equity and an enjoyable life, which call for improving living conditions in such areas as income, housing, transportation, employment, education, social support, and health services.

- Support economic and employment agendas, policies, planning processes and programs that are inclusive, health- promoting and that contribute to the equitable distribution of resources, and the associated equities in health.
- Promote urban research agendas that are organized around a conceptual framework that position health, equity, and sustainability as central policy goals for urban management.

Changing the Way We Do Business to Ensure Our Young People are Ready by 21

The BMHA will advocate for programs and policies that will mobilize young people in marginalized communities, including those transitioning from foster care, and prepare them for college, work, and a life-sustaining and life-affirming lifestyle by the age of twenty-one with community support and adult advocates.

Recommendations

- Develop and increase opportunities for youth that will create and sustain long-term mentoring relationships, enhance college/career counseling both in school and out of school and provide wrap around support and adult advocates for youth to address both academic and non- academic needs.
- Provide effective linkages for youth to culturally competent, behavioral health professionals that are trained in developmentally appropriate practices and treatment interventions to help youth build resiliency, recover from adverse traumatic childhood experiences and avoid being pushed along the “cradle to prison” pipeline.
- Support increased community organizing and leadership training for youth to enhance and strengthen their advocacy skills, their voice and inherent power to inform the work, and that will allow young people to identify the challenges they face, articulate their visions for change and assist in the building of programs and interventions to achieve those visions.

Black Rage: The Crisis Confronting African American Men and Boys and the Blueprint toward Solutions

The BMHA will highlight, support and promote programs, practices and policies that foster city-wide

collaborations, increase financial support and refine programmatic strategies to realistically address the alarming socio-economic and psycho-cultural challenges faced by Black men and boys.

Recommendations

- Advocate for more schools and community based organizations to develop curriculum and after-school activities for boys and adolescent males that are focused on character development, cognitive restructuring, spiritual development, African American history and culture, life skills training, anger management, and employability skills.
- Promote male-centered initiatives focused on civic engagement and community service, with the goals of preventing substance abuse, reducing involvement in gangs, decreasing school violence and, addressing race-based trauma.
- Increase access to programs that offer a range of mentoring options, including 1-on-1 and group mentoring efforts, and are focused on the holistic development of African American men and adolescent males. In these programs, attention must be paid to educational success, civic responsibility, educational attainment, career exploration, and conflict resolution and leadership development.
- Expand community-based programs for African American men and boys that provide opportunities to practice and reflect on problem solving, decision making, and that allow for the discussion of common experiences around police aggression, violence, and trauma, which will lead to healing and growth.

Urban Alchemy

The Environmental Construct of Racism

The BMHA will highlight and support programs and policies that neutralize the effects of approaches detrimental to communities such as mass incarceration, disinvestment, blight and deindustrialization by undertaking deliberate actions to create meaningful spaces and improve quality of life.

Recommendations

- Engage in candid discussion of a City's problems to get to plausible and sustainable remedies, based upon a consensus of what the community is "for."
- Keep the entire city and its people in mind by walking the community and looking at different areas of a city

as connected and with the "potential for continuity".

- Through a creative, collaborative process, express the vision to make a mark that fosters the implementation of positive community change that addresses historical and current social policies and conditions.
- Invite people to shared public spaces and develop these spaces for the public good.
- Launch a public plan of action and align resources to tackle the issue or accomplish the task significant enough to warrant change.
- Show solidarity with all life. Employ the mindset that when any part of the city succeeds, we all share in the success, and when any part of the city fails, we all feel the failure.
- Celebrate your accomplishments.
- View the community not just through the lens of what needs to be "fixed" but also as a source of identifying those elements and strategies that have fostered resilience over time that can be built upon and bolstered.

The Gardner's Tale: How Race and Racism Affect our Mental Health & Well Being

The BMHA will highlight and support programs and policies with a theoretic framework for understanding racism on 3 levels:

Institutionalized, personally mediated, and internalized. This framework is useful for raising new hypotheses about the basis of race-associated differences in health outcomes, as well as for designing effective interventions to eliminate those differences.

Recommendations

*Dr. Jones presented an allegory about a gardener (those in positions of power) 2 flower boxes, rich and poor soil, and red and pink flowers. This allegory illustrates the relationship between the 3 levels of racism and may guide our thinking about how to intervene to mitigate the impacts of racism on health.

- To "set things right" in the garden, society must fully address institutional and structural racism, even as we also address personally- mediated and internalized racism.
- Define the role of public health researchers in vigorously exploring the basis of pink-red disparities, including the differences in the soil and the structural

factors and acts of omission that maintain those differences.

- Create a model that gets the gardener to own the whole garden and not be satisfied when only the red flowers thrive.
- If the gardener will not invest in the whole garden, then the pink flowers (those not thriving) will need to recruit or grow their own garden.
- Have difficult conversations with others when you hear or see racism, whether explicit or implicit. Challenge racist assumptions by asking about supporting facts and evidence.

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