

HENNEPIN COUNTY

PUBLIC HEALTH

Birth Justice Strategic Plan

Advancing Maternal Health in Hennepin County



Hennepin County Public Health / Maternal Health
730 S 8th St
Minneapolis, MN 55415
ashley.johnson02@hennepin.us

10/13/2023



Contents

Intro	3
Phases.....	3, 4
Strategies and Initiatives	4, 5
Next Steps	5

Intro

The Birth Justice Strategic Plan Report is a guide to advance maternal health for and alongside Black and American Indian birthing people and communities in Hennepin County. This report is part of the larger Maternal Health Initiative and supported by Pandemic Recovery funds through December 2024.

Maternal mortality is a devastating health disparity in the United States, and in Hennepin County. Black and American Indian pregnant people suffer significant disparities and have much higher rates of maternal mortality compared to white people. Current and historical racism has created these disparities. For example, in Minnesota, 13% of the birthing population is Black and 2% is American Indian, yet they represent 23% and 8% of maternal deaths in our state, respectively ([Minnesota Maternal Mortality Report 2018](#)).

This plan has been co-created with community members and organizations involved in Black and American Indian maternal health for the entirety of the process. The approach has centered community-driven solutions in defining how to realize birth justice – when birthing people and their families are empowered in all stages of the birth process from prenatal to postpartum to make decisions and experience healthy outcomes for themselves, their babies, and their communities. We will continue to get community input and feedback in the implementation and future work.

Phases

The creation of the Birth Justice Strategic Plan was created through multiple phases and will continue into implementation and beyond.

Discovery and learning, August – December 2022

The first phase focused on discovery and learning. Within this phase the birth justice collaborative was formed and was led by:

- Liberty Northside Healing Space
- The University of Minnesota Robert J. Jones Urban Research and Outreach-Engagement Center
- Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center
- Native American Community Clinic
- Coordinating organization, Collective Action Lab.

The collaborative convened over 300 Black and American Indian community members across Hennepin County in a series of engagement sessions. In these sessions, community members shared their wisdom and knowledge to surface key strategies that will advance maternal health and birth justice. These sessions have guided the Birth Justice Strategic Plan's recommendations.

Strategy and plan formation, January – June 2023

Phases two and three involved strategy and plan formation as well as revision and implementation planning. In these phases, a 50-member leadership coalition made up of community members and individuals representing health systems and government convened to draft an initial plan. The leadership coalition used the community knowledge and wisdom surfaced at the engagement sessions to co-design five actionable strategies. The draft was then shared with the community for revisions. Implementation planning with the leadership coalition began once the community provided revisions.

Implementation, October 2023 – Beyond

The current phase involves the implementation of the Birth Justice Strategic Plan. Throughout implementation, strategy groups made up of community members and individuals representing health systems, nonprofits, and government will convene to develop work plans and execute pilot programs. The birth justice collaborative expanded the core partners to include the Cultural Wellness Center and Division of Indian Work.

Strategies and implementation of the Birth Justice Strategic Plan

Strategies

Below are the five strategies of action that have been identified from engagement sessions to advance maternal health for and alongside Black and American Indian communities:

1. Acknowledge and address impacts of racism by piloting a cultural parenting program with financial support for the first year after birth.
2. Advocate for and radically reform policy and payment for care delivery by collectively pursuing a shared advocacy agenda.

3. Create culturally meaningful workforce pathways by piloting a cultural advocate and navigator program for community members.
4. Enforce a coordinated system of anti-bias accountability by designing and implementing an anti-bias report card program.
5. Invest in a network of trusted cultural providers and resources by establishing a community-endorsement process and a provider network.

Implementation

Implementation of these initiatives will be iterative, ongoing, and regularly informed through input from community as we take them from paper to practice. To help continue this work we have added two more partners to the collaborative, the Division of Indian Work and The Cultural Wellness Center. With our partners we have identified some examples of what implementation may include:

- Piloting a cultural parenting program that provides support and financial stipends to families through the first year after birth.
- Establishing billing codes for cultural leaders/healers and resources to enable reimbursement and incentive payments for addressing impacts of racism, similar to billing codes that address social determinants of health.
- Building upon the Dignity in Pregnancy and Childbirth Act by designing a multi-faceted anti-bias training and accountability system that includes cultural training by cultural providers.
- Having cultural services provided by community-endorsed providers that include birthing classes, ceremonial birthing practices, peer support, and cultural advocates.

Hennepin County's role

Hennepin County's role is to support community in accomplishing the goals and vision they have established for themselves. The process of engaging and convening community to create the plan resulted in strategies with short and long-term actions to achieve birth justice. This includes the potential for impact beyond the County. The recommendations within the birth justice plan will require ongoing support to address the root causes of disparities and make changes within systems. The collaborative is committed to continue the work, engage new partners, and fundraise to sustain resources and momentum toward advancing maternal health and ongoing birth justice work.

Next steps

Through December 2024, Hennepin County Public Health will work to support the birth justice collaborative and implementation of the plan. This includes upholding our agreement to support recommendations coming from the collaborative and birth justice strategy groups, executing and funding contracts supporting implementation, as well as providing ongoing management and support of the County-BJC relationship. We also have staff participating on strategy groups that are creating work plans and pilots for the priority initiatives.