

## **Brandeis Black Maternal Health Organization (BBMH)**

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Black mothers within the healthcare space receive unequal opportunities and are more vulnerable to preventable consequences, such as high child mortality and death after childbirth. Brandeis Black Maternal Health Organization (BBMH) is an initiative to address Black maternal disparities in healthcare in Waltham and the Boston-area. The primary mission of this organization is to provide education and resources for Black women in need of reproductive/maternal support. BBMH aims to address the challenges faced by Black mothers in order to protect their lives. With our partner organization, Resilient Sisterhood Project (RSP), we have facilitated a five-part series addressing the social determinants impacting Black maternity and childbirth within our community.

### **Action Plan**

Spring 2022 semester was focussed on exploring the questions; Why are our Black women 3-4 times more likely to experience a pregnancy-related death than white women? What will BBMH do to combat this social and medical injustice? We began to answer these questions through five workshops and/or events held in-person and online inviting Brandeis students, faculty and Waltham families to indulge in. BBMH has had the opportunity to open conversations that seek to deepen our understanding of issues affecting maternal and child health, create networks with STEM/public health students and professionals, and collaborate with the Resilient Sisterhood Project to educate and empower Black women affected by diseases of the reproductive system. We assessed our workshops through Google form surveys and open-group discussions during workshops. The survey helped us evaluate who our audience was (demographics, general interests and knowledge of Black maternal health) and what workshops to design/launch for BBMH. The open-group discussions also helped evaluate general concerns, questions and knowledge about Black maternal Health. Additionally, we were able to hear about personal experiences that speak to why the statistics remain unchanged for Black women!

- **Workshop #1:** Introduction to Black Reproductive/Maternal Health: An educational workshop/presentation on healthcare inequities and obstetric complications of Black women, topics of intersectionality and cultural humility within society/healthcare. Guest speakers Kathryn Bethea-Rivera and Lily Marcelin from RSP held presentations/discussions on Black Maternal Health.
- **Workshop #2:** BaselineMed x BBMH “Black Maternal Healthcare Disparities”: In collaboration with BaselineMed, an open discussion was held in-person to talk about intersectionality, cultural humility, self-advocacy and racial disparities with participants
- **Workshop #3:** Medical Perspectives: A panel night with invited Black doula and a prospective gynecologist to discuss obstetric complications/disparities of Black women, controversies within gynecology, and reparations for Black maternal health. Guest panelists: Zoe Fort, Lanthara Langlois, and Macda Garda.
- **Event #4:** Tufts Virtual Black Maternal Health Conference
- **Event #5:** Black-Owned Bakery Social: A hosted bakery social at the SCC with free cupcakes and pastries from Black-owned bakeries in Boston (Sweet Teez & Cupcake

Therapy). The event gave Brandeis student/faculty exposure about BBMH's mission and goals for the new semester.

### **Sustainability Plan**

Brandeis Black Maternal Health will be rebranded in the next semester. At the end of our R/C CLIF chapter, we have invited some Black students on a meeting call to discuss current concerns about the reproductive education and resources provided on campus. We recognized that BBMH has the power to challenge Brandeis on making effective change. Therefore, BBMH has decided to expand our mission statement that encompasses the goals and passions of its Black students. Starting Fall 2022, BBMH will be in the process of becoming an official organization on campus with funding to support ambitious ideas such as food/clothing drivers for Mothers/babies, volunteering opportunities at homeless shelters catering to mothers/children, gynecological/reproductives resources for POC students, and education on campus specific to Black maternity and reproduction (improved curriculum, etc). We will also elect new E-board members to support the new vision for BBMH and strengthen the work done by this organization. Positions include an outreach coordinator, marketing coordinator, and volunteer coordinator.

### **Final Reflections**

Our proposed ideas for Spring 2022 are different from what was achieved this semester. Although we had the amazing opportunity to introduce the problem challenging Black women (in Waltham, Boston and the entire country) we did not get to discuss or include other topics such as environmental effects or advocacy of legislative/health policy. Instead we had alternative workshops and events that served similar purposes of educating our Brandeis community. What I have learned from these challenges is that adaptability is key to success. We may have not been able to accomplish everything we had set out to do at the start but we have come very far and even produced fun projects/ideas that have opened new doors for BBMH. We never stopped when things got rocky or seemingly pointless. Lastly, the field of Black maternal health needs young people involved! It was a shocker to me that older women from RSP or Tufts University were excited to see college students addressing a huge problem like Black maternal disparities while taking control of their own reproductive health and rights. Overall, I've learned that a misconception I'm guilty of is assuming that this problem only concerns Black mothers. Black men, girls, boys, queer—everyone is affected and an important piece of resolving the problem!

### **Budget Review (Final Revision)**

In light of challenges encountered this semester, some of the intended items on the budget list were not ordered. Most of the workshops were held via Zoom. However, funding was used for Conference Food; refreshments (Dunkin Donuts/Pizza) and other supplies (tissues/plates/cups) were ordered for the in-person event. Additionally, we had to omit the end-of-semester celebration and opt for an alternative, the "Black-Owned Bakery Social" held last two weeks. We ordered cupcakes, cookies, and brownies from Sweet Teez Bakery and Cupcake Therapy, two Black-Owned bakeries based in Boston. The total cost spent on refreshments and supplies for

both in-person events is \$553.11. We also spent \$360.79 on “thank you” gifts for Guest speakers and panelists who were part of our BBMH workshops. The grand total cost comes to \$913.90. The remaining funding to be returned to R/C CLIF is \$414.48.