

BRAVE

BLACK REPRODUCTIVE ADVOCACY EDUCATION

Resource Guide

A guidebook on self-advocacy for Black patients, best-practices for providers, and recommendations for organizations and institutions to improve reproductive health outcomes for Black Utahns.



Background Information



The history of medical racism and the presence of systemic racism today have resulted in alarming disparities in Black reproductive health outcomes. This page provides additional context for the necessity of this guidebook.

What are Black maternal health disparities?

Health disparities are health differences linked with social, economic, and/or environmental disadvantages.¹ The national and Utah-specific statistics are troubling, yet crucial to understand in order to address them:

- African Americans have the highest infant mortality rate of any racial or ethnic group in the United States.²
- African American women are at higher risk for conditions like preeclampsia, eclampsia, embolisms, and mental health conditions.³
- 11% of Black infants in Utah are born with a low birth weight, compared to the state average of 7%.⁴
- Black infant mortality rates in Utah are nearly double the state average.⁴

What causes the disparities?

These health disparities are linked to a number of factors, including:

- Stereotypes, biases, and race-based myths held by health professionals.⁵
- Challenges in access to resources, such as health insurance and/or culturally competent care.⁶
- Distrust in the healthcare system due to a dark history of medical racism.⁷
- Racial battle fatigue.⁸

What is Racial battle fatigue?

Coined by Dr. William Smith, a professor of ethnic studies at the University of Utah, racial battle fatigue is a "systemic, racism-related, repetitive stress injury."⁸ It describes the physical responses to dealing with racism on a daily basis, including mental, emotional, and physical strain which can lead to a suppressed immune system and increased sickness.

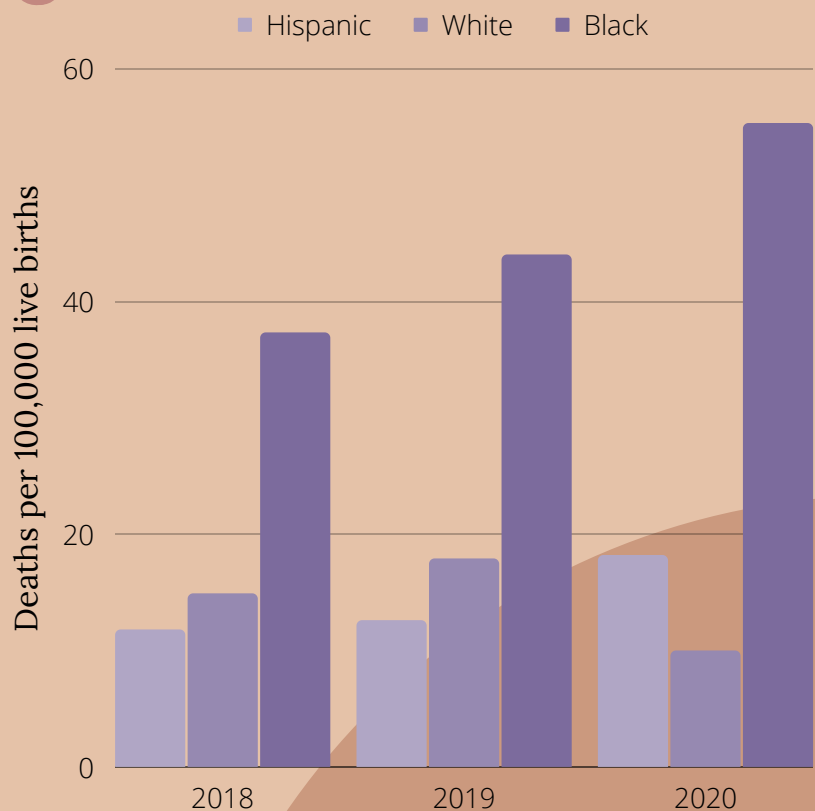
What can we do about it?

Understanding the problem is the first step in addressing it —**you're in the right place.**

Actionable steps are covered in this guidebook, including tips for expecting Black parents while navigating their reproductive journey, best-practices for providers facilitating care, and recommendations for organizations to achieve sustainable institutional culture change.



Maternal Mortality Rates in the U.S. per Race & Ethnicity



Source: National Center for Health Statistics, National Vital Statistics System | ABC News

For Black Parents



01.

Be your own advocate⁹

- Write down all of your questions before your appointments so you don't forget to ask any of them when you get there.
- Ask your provider to explain all of your options in detail, including benefits, risks, and alternatives.¹⁰
 - Feel free to ask your provider to slow down and explain any medical jargon used so you can take notes.
- Trust your gut—get a second, third or even fourth opinion.
 - Remember that you can fire your provider at any time for any reason.¹⁰
- Always ask for an itemized bill to avoid hidden charges.
- Don't be afraid to speak your mind! It's your body and your pregnancy, YOU are in charge.

02.

Consider care from a doula

A doula is a professional trained in childbirth who can help you through your reproductive journey with emotional, physical, and educational support.¹¹ Doulas can:

- Help you build a birth plan that aligns with your vision.
- Provide care both during and post-pregnancy.
- Advocate for you during appointments and throughout labor.
 - If you do not have a doula, have a trusted family member or friend present instead.
- If it is available to you, receiving care from a Black doula might improve health outcomes.

Note: Studies have shown that having a doula decreases the overall cesarean rate by 50%, the length of labor by 25%, the use of oxytocin by 40%, and requests for an epidural by 60%.¹¹

03.

Find ways to cope

- Take time out for yourself:
 - Engage in yoga, mindfulness, journaling, and movement.⁸ Even a 30-second breathing exercise can reduce levels of anxiety and stress.
- Talk to someone you trust—you are not alone!
- Be gentle with yourself: give yourself permission to disengage from the things that exhaust you.



Meet Cándi, a full-spectrum Doula:



For Providers



Healthcare providers play a critical role in reducing the Black maternal health disparity. Here are some tips that can help:

01. **Learn about the dark history of medical racism in America**

Black Americans have historically faced discrimination and abuse from healthcare professionals.⁵ This history has left a legacy that Black people are still confronting today. Understanding this can help you work towards becoming more trustworthy for your Black patients.

Note: The books *Medical Apartheid* by Harriet A Washington, and *Killing the Black Body* by Dorothy Roberts are great places to start.

02. **Believe your patients! Ensure they feel heard**

Research has shown that the healthcare system still under-treats pain in Black patients. Acknowledge this and pay extra attention to this topic in prenatal care and laboring patients.¹²

03. **Provide and participate in unconscious bias, diversity, and equity trainings**

Additional education through trainings on these topics can help you to recognize implicit bias in yourself and in your office. This is crucial to ensuring you provide equal care among your patients, regardless of race or ethnicity.

An implicit bias-check strategy: "Mentally change the race/ethnicity of your patient, then challenge yourself to see if you would do or recommend anything differently."¹²

04. **Recognize racial battle fatigue & implement trauma-informed care practices**

Dealing with racism in one's daily life can manifest itself in different health issues, called racial battle fatigue.⁸ Dr. William Smith discusses this in more detail in the video below.

Trauma-informed care offers a compassionate approach, considering all elements of a patient's life situation to provide them with healthcare to heal, not just treat. "Adopting trauma-informed practices can potentially improve patient engagement, treatment adherence, and health outcomes, as well as provider and staff wellness."¹³

Learn more about racial battle fatigue:



For Organizations & Institutions



Changes on an individual level, while essential, are not enough to create sustainable operational changes. This page provides tips for organizations to support a broad institutional culture change.

01. **Provide adequate education on racial discrimination**

Understanding racial discrimination outside of healthcare, and the differences in care and illness presentations that are unique to the Black community.¹⁴

- For a more human approach than traditional bias trainings, consider projects that elevate Black voices to share their experiences with healthcare providers.
- Education should also include training on racial battle fatigue and how it impacts the physical health of Black individuals.

03. **Increase access to high-quality, affordable healthcare and insurance.**

Health insurance, or lack thereof, acts as a barrier for Black pregnant people to get the care they need.⁶

- Increase funds towards community healthcare clinics, to provide access to high-quality care for uninsured individuals.¹⁴
- Extend legal protections with higher-quality insurance plans to government-provided insurance programs.¹⁴

05. **Prioritize culturally competent care**

Culturally competent care delivers quality care to diverse patients by personalizing healthcare according to cultural and linguistic differences.¹⁶

- Prioritize and increase access to Black-led community-based providers, like doulas. Hiring more Black physicians and healthcare educators can help bridge gaps in cultural competency.¹⁴
- Provide Interpreters: this would address language barriers which can affect Black migrants in the community.¹⁴

06. **Improve workplace conditions in hospitals**

Address inadequate staffing, heavy workloads, and inadequate wages to improve shortages in healthcare providers.¹⁵



Sources & Credits



BRAVE Campaign Members:

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