

MENTAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



ISSUE STATEMENT

THE HISTORICAL Black experience in America continues to reflect a disparate degree of trauma, violence, and mental and physical health concerns when compared to European-Americans. We recognize the parallel between the historic dehumanization, oppression, and violence against the Black community and ongoing structural and institutional racism, as well as the connection between these factors and the apparent lack of resources specifically aiding in the treatment of Black mental, behavioral, and physical health concerns.

BACKGROUND

The history of Black lives in America is one of trauma, oppression, resilience, and constant struggle. Through the fight for equity and justice in a system that perpetually oppresses Black communities, progress has been made. However that continuous fight is not without its impacts. Systemic racism, colonialism, and the constant fight against it leaves behind trauma and severe detriment to the mental health of our community. In fact, the CDC reports that Black Americans are 20% *more likely* to report serious psychological distress than that of White Americans¹.



MENTAL & BEHAVIORAL HEALTH QUICK FACTS:

- > Black individuals report psychological distress at a rate of 20% *higher* than white individuals in the U.S.
- > This year, rates of anxiety and depression have increased by over 20% in the Black Community.
- > Only 3 in 10 Black individuals ever receive mental health treatment.

Indeed, to many Black individuals, this statistic comes as no surprise. The current picture of the Black experience in the U.S. is a story of disparities. While the Black community only makes up a small portion of the U.S. population, we are frequently over-represented in at-risk populations, making up almost half of all homelessness and children in foster care, as well as half of the population currently incarcerated in prison². Exposure to these circumstances are not without their impacts - frequently resulting in detrimentally impacted mental health, a sharp decline in physical health, and the perpetuation of these impacts passed to the next generation.

When looking at the issue of police violence against the Black community, the consequences on mental health are striking. As these tragedies begin to become more high-profile, we are seeing an increase in the signs of PTSD and anxiety among our Black communities. Since the events in Minneapolis, depression and anxiety in Black Americans has increased by over 20%³. Indeed, poor mental health can affect your ability to maintain stable employment, healthy relationships, and overall well-being. Generally speaking, a remedy to mental health distress is of course mental health services. Yet here too we see remnants of systemic oppression. While Black Americans are more likely to report severe emotional distress, only around 33% will ever receive any form of mental health intervention services, compared to a national average of 45%⁴. The factors contributing to this range across a broad spectrum including:

- **Stigma:** a study conducted in 2014 found that African Americans were very concerned about seeking mental health services due to the stigma associated with having a mental health issue and receiving treatment⁵.
- **Access to culturally appropriate treatment:** For instance, as of 2015, only 4% of mental health providers in the U.S. identified as African American⁶. Misdiagnosis was also found to be common amongst African Americans, with evaluation often neglecting to include key contextual factors of the Black experience in America⁷.
- **Access to quality care:** Black Americans are less likely to have access to mental health services in their community, less likely to receive best-practice treatments for depression and anxiety, and more likely to report receiving poor services during treatment⁸.



Fact:

Only 4% of Mental Health providers in the U.S. are Black.

Black lives matter.
Black mental health has to matter too.

CONTEXTUALIZATION

The Flagstaff community is not immune to the impacts of systemic racism and oppression towards the Black community, nor are we immune to its impacts on mental health. The issue at hand is that Black individuals and communities experience mental health issues as a result of racism and oppression at very high rates with severe consequences, and the services in place have historically fallen short when it comes to addressing said mental health impacts. Therefore, the conversation around mental health in the Black community of Flagstaff is one that must be addressed on two fronts: reactive and preventative measures. Reactive measures include addressing the disparities in mental health treatment services for our Black community. How do we increase access and quality of care? How do we address stigma? How do we ensure our services are culturally competent? Yet should we seek to see long-lasting improvement we must also address how to prevent such detrimental impacts on the mental health of our community in the first place.

Improvement comes with increasing awareness, identifying what contributes to the mental health impacts that accompany living while Black, and addressing those contributing factors head on. By acknowledging the impacts that systemic oppression has on our community in Flagstaff, addressing that system, and ensuring our safety net of mental health services for the Black community are effective, respectful, and easily accessible, we can seek to finally close the gaps of disparities in the arena of mental health for our community.

KEY QUESTIONS

- WHAT do you feel are the primary concerns facing the Black community of Flagstaff regarding mental health?
- IS mental and behavioral health an important aspect of healthcare and service to fund and provide for the Flagstaff community? Why or why not?
- DO we need resources within the Flagstaff community to specifically address the mental and behavioral health needs for the Black Community? Why or why not?
- WHAT resources are you aware of within Flagstaff specifically addressing mental and behavioral health for the Black Community?
- HOW important is it to you that mental health service providers come from the same cultural or ethnic background as you and why?
- WHAT have you personally seen as a barrier to seeking mental health services in Flagstaff?

References

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- WHAT does culturally competent care look like to you?
- WHAT do you feel needs to change in order to ensure continued positive development of the Flagstaff community in this area?
- WHAT does change look like to you when it comes to Mental and Behavioral Health?
- WHAT communities online have you found helpful for mental health and overall support?
- WHAT mental health resources in Flagstaff have helped you or a friend the most?