Health Equity Response to COVID-19 in Allegheny County:

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Racial toll of virus grows even starker as more data emerges

COVID-19 Brings Health Disparities Research to the Forefront

Black, Hispanic children hospitalized for coronavirus at higher rates, CDC reports show

Doctors, Community Groups Struggle to Tackle Covid-19 Racial Disparities
Black Equity Coalition

Formed in April 2020, The Black Equity Coalition (BEC) is comprised of a group of physicians, researchers, epidemiologists, public health and health care practitioners, social scientists, community funders, and government officials concerned about addressing COVID-19 in vulnerable populations.

Our goal is to ensure an equitable response to the COVID-19 pandemic, based on socio-economic and culturally relevant data, that produces culturally relevant responses to reduce health inequities and improve health and well-being in general.

Thus, we are working to establish a community oriented, preventive health care infrastructure that will be better able to respond and meet the emerging health needs of communities of color.

We are working primarily in Allegheny County, PA (Pittsburgh and vicinity) and across the state of PA.
Figure 1: The Hub and Spokes – Black Equity Coalition (BEC) Working Groups

The Huddle: cross-sector group of physicians, social scientists, researchers, epidemiologists, civic community leaders, and philanthropists that work to coordinate the working groups of the Coalition, build viable connections, and fundraise to meet community needs.

Education Working Group: advises mitigation strategies to remote learning challenges; enhances connections to community support, especially for Black and Brown families.

Data Working Group: analyzes data and creates data visualizations; submits data requests and monitors trends in COVID-19 cases, testing, vaccinations and other available information in support of the Coalition’s strategic priorities.

Policy Working Group: supports data utilization for policy recommendations and legislation focused on reducing racial disparities and methods to implement racism as a public health crisis legislation.

Black Business Working Group: explores the needs of Black-owned businesses during the pandemic.

Statewide Coalition Working Group: coordinates efforts across the Commonwealth of PA, creating infrastructure focused on responses to comorbidities in Black and Brown communities.

Community Engagement Working Group: provides clear and consistent messaging regarding BEC efforts and goals; currently exploring additional social service agencies partnerships.

Community Health Working Group: explores testing and vaccination resources and current priorities; supports linking health care to wrap-around services in Black, Brown, and underserved communities.

Staff (managed by Huddle): Consultant (hired 2/2021); Community Engagement Coordinator (hired 8/2021); BEC Director (hired 2/2022); State Grant Project Director (hired 2/2022). Staff to be hired in 2022 include Communications Coordinator, Data Analyst, and Community Health Advocates.

FQHC: Federally Qualified Health Center
HBCU: Historically Black Colleges and Universities
Vision

• Equitable data collection
• Data-to-action approach
• Translation of data to communities
• Data literacy activities
• Transparency
Developing Trust and Trustworthiness

• Black-led - by community, university, and foundation leaders who are supported by allies
• Input and validation of data from community
• Advocacy for data that meets the needs of population
• Shared decision making and community ownership
• Addressing oppressive systems and racism
Economics

• Data working group has been meeting twice weekly for over two years (since April 2020)
• Working group members are participating with in-kind effort
• Initial grants were for organizational infrastructure and now for outreach- more funding needed for data infrastructure, analysis and translation
• There are many behind-the-scenes infrastructure needs
  • Data systems
  • Data integration
  • Memorandums of understanding/negotiating agreement
Figure 2: Contextual Timeline and Black Equity Coalition (BEC) Milestones

Pre-BEC Context

2015
Angela Glover Blackwell calls out City of Pittsburgh

2016
“All-In Pittsburgh” group convened to establish equitable development agenda

2018
17-year-old Antwon Rose killed by East Pittsburgh police officer

2018
Black Environmental Collective formed to advance solutions for environmental justice

2018
CDC-funded Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) Coalition formed

2019
Data show chronic disease mortality disproportionate for Black residents of Allegheny County

BEC Milestones

2019
“Pittsburgh’s Inequality Across Gender and Race” report released by city Gender Equity Commission and Black femmes respond

2019
City Council of Pittsburgh votes to declare racism as a public health crisis

March
WHO declares COVID-19 pandemic; First COVID-19 cases in Allegheny County confirmed

(1) BEC Data Working Group Established

(2) Maps for COVID-19 Testing
Producing maps and data stories that inform testing resources in FQHCs

(3) Contact Tracing Model
FQHCs in partnership with ACHD to improve reach to Black communities

March
Data Disaggregated by Race
Meetings with ACHD to advocate for data accuracy and transparency by race/ethnicity

(4) Data Disaggregated by Race

(5) BEC Community Engagement Working Group Established

(6) Partnership with Pennsylvania Department of Health (PA DOH)
Monthly meetings with Secretary of Health and team

(7) Foundation Grants
Heinz Endowments + The Pittsburgh Foundation

(8) “Missing Our Shot” Report on COVID-19 Vaccine Equity in Allegheny County

(9) Impact Award
National Neighborhood Indicators Partnership (NNIP)

(10) Vaccination Panel Discussion
BEC with Acting Physician General, Dr Denise A. Johnson, MD

(11) Contract with PA DOH
Work on vaccine uptake and communications in communities
Results - Year in Review 2021

- Maintained the Dashboard
- Missing Our Shot Report
- Vaccination Data
- Building State Relationships

- Census Opportunity Project Prize
- Developed Social Media Content
- Telling Our Story
- Better-Understand Vaccine Hesitancy
Lessons Learned: Facilitators and Barriers

• **What are/were the top facilitators of success?**
  • Collaboration
  • Being consistent, credible and reliable
  • Staying accountable to one another/trusting relationships
  • Data advocacy and interpretation

• **What are/were the top barriers you experienced?**
  • Gatekeepers (health systems, health depts, elected officials)
  • Limited funding
  • Structural barriers (racism, trust in healthcare system)
  • Data access (institutions not providing information)
  • Channels of misinformation/disinformation