

2023 DIGITAL TOOLKIT

**BIRTH
EQUITY
PROJECT**

INTRODUCTION

The Birth Equity Project is aimed at examining the historical context of our present-day maternal mortality crisis and looking towards the future to develop multidisciplinary approaches to reducing the disparities in health outcomes and disrupting the current medical establishment. The goal of this project is to educate the Columbia University community on the racial and health inequities that shape the birthing experience for Black people in the US. We hope to promote birth equity by amplifying the voices of Black birth workers by hosting a panel of Black maternal experts including policy advocates, OB/GYNs, midwives, and doulas.

The timing of our project coincides with **Black Maternal Health Week (April 11th - April 17th)**, a week to increase awareness about Black maternal health. This toolkit is filled with resources to help you become an advocate for Black maternal health. Inside, you'll find a reading list, important national and local legislation regarding maternal health, and key organizations to follow, to name a few things.

We want to thank you for being a part of our project, and hope that you find the following information aids you in your journey to becoming a maternal health advocate!

Amaya , Paige , and Zaire

DEDICATIONS

The Birth Equity Project is dedicated to all the Black women lost to the maternal mortality crisis and the Black women who were victims of reproductive injustices and medical experimentation throughout history -- namely Anarcha, Betsey, Lucy, the mothers of gynecology, and Mary and Minnie Relf.

This project is also dedicated to the Black feminist thinkers: Loretta Ross, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, bell hooks, and many more who remind us that the sky is the limit in envisioning a future where all can be free and thrive.

THE BIRTH EQUITY PROJECT TEAM



Amaya is passionate about Black Maternal Health rights and improving birthing outcomes for Black women. She's helped cultivate and grow a community doula program for women of color in Lancaster, PA.

Amaya Languaine (MSPH '23)

Paige is a staunch supporter of reproductive justice and birth equity to improve Black maternal outcomes. Hailing from New Orleans, Louisiana, she is passionate about uplifting and amplifying the work of Southern activists and birth workers.

Paige Sentino (MSPH '23)



In combination with her public health training and work experience with women's rights organizations, Zaire plans to use the knowledge she's gained to equip herself with the necessary training to address clinical and structural inequities as a physician in the future.

Zaire Bartholomew (MSPH '23)

KEY TERMINOLOGIES

BIRTH DOU·LA

NOUN

A person that serves as a constant presence of support for an individual during a major life transition. A birth doula is trained to assist a birthing person during pregnancy and through the childbirth experience.

BIRTH EQ·UI·TY

NOUN

The assurance of the conditions of optimal births for all people with a willingness to address racial and social inequalities.

BIRTH WORK·ER

NOUN

Professionally trained workers who provide emotional support to birthing people and their families during labor.

BLACK FEMINISM

NOUN

An intellectual, artistic, philosophical, and activist practice grounded in Black women's lived experiences.

BLACK JOY/AUTONOMY

NOUN • VERB

The ability of Black people of expansive backgrounds across the diaspora to live free, joyful, and self-determined lives in safe environments that promote overall wellbeing.

INTERSECTIONALITY

NOUN

An analytical framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege.

MATERNAL MORTALITY

NOUN

The death of a woman during pregnancy, at delivery, or soon after delivery is a tragedy for her family and for society as a whole.

MID·WIFE

NOUN

A trained health professional who helps birthing people during labor, delivery, and after the birth of their babies.

OBSTETRIC VIOLENCE

NOUN

Harm inflicted during or in relation to pregnancy, childbearing, and the postpartum period. This can include verbal abuse or denial of treatment.

STER·I·LI·ZA·TION

NOUN

A surgical procedure that renders individuals unable to have children. In the US, Black women and other groups were forcibly sterilized.

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

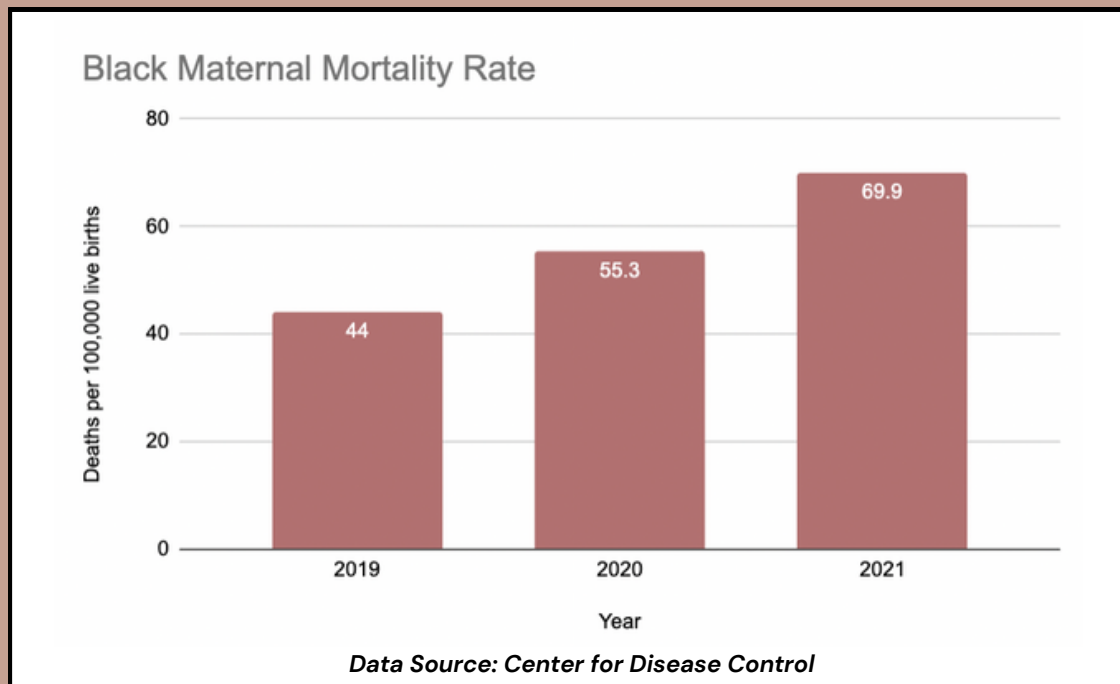
NOUN

The human right to control our sexuality, our gender, our work, and our reproduction.



MATERNAL MORTALITY IN THE US

According to the World Health Organization, maternal death is defined as a death that occurs while pregnant or within 42 days of delivery. Compared to other industrialized nations, the United States has the highest maternal mortality rate (MMR). In 2021, the MMR was 32.9 deaths for every 100,000 births. These outcomes are worse for Black women, who are three to four times more likely to die in childbirth than their white counterparts.



The Black maternal mortality rate continues to worsen, with it reaching 69.9 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2021. Factors that contribute to disparities in maternal health outcomes include implicit biases, structural racism, underlying chronic conditions, and a lack of access to quality healthcare (Source: [CDC](#)). The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated these inequities. Addressing structural barriers to care and implementing culturally component, diverse, and sustainable solutions is key to advancing birth equity.

SOLUTIONS

There is **no one size fits all solution** to combating the maternal and reproductive disparities we are currently facing.

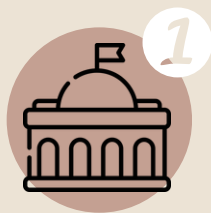
Diversifying the labor & delivery care team is one example of a potential solution.

Studies have shown that births attended by doulas or midwives have improved outcomes including decreased cesarean rates, lower induction rates, and a lower infant mortality rate ([Source: TrueCare](#)).

Removing structural barriers and expanding access to doulas and midwives should be a legislative priority - many states have implemented pilot programs to allow doulas to receive Medicaid reimbursements, increasing access to low-income individuals.



MULTISECTORAL APPROACH



Legislation



Clinical Engagement



Community Activism

Here at the Birth Equity Project, we understand that it takes a multisectoral approach to address these issues. Combining legislation, clinical engagement, and community activism is imperative to developing holistic solutions that address all areas impacting the health and well-being of Black Women.

The Birth Equity Project implores our policy, healthcare, and community leaders to engage in strategic partnerships that foster equity and inclusion by using their varied skills to address this important issue.

RELEVANT LEGISLATION

MOMNIBUS HEALTH ACT

- Series of 12 acts that seek to address the structural drivers of the maternal mortality crisis



EXPANDING MEDICAID POSTPARTUM COVERAGE

- Increasing Medicaid postpartum coverage to 12 months after delivery instead of 60 days



DOULA REIMBURSEMENT FOR MEDICAID

- Several states have implemented pilot programs to increase doula access to Medicaid recipients



NEW YORK REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ACT

- Expanded protection for abortion rights in NY state



TRIUMPH FOR NEW MOMS ACT

- Created the first maternal mental health task force



PREGNANT WORKERS FAIRNESS ACT

- Expands protections for pregnant employees



PUMP FOR NURSING MOTHERS ACT

- Gives nursing employees the right to have breaks to pump at work



NY SENATE BILLS 1867

- Establishes the NY state community doula directory for doulas serving Medicaid patients



PANELIST BIOGRAPHY



ABOUT

SIMONE COLBERT

Simone Colbert

is a compassionate and knowledgeable full-spectrum doula who has been assisting families during their perinatal journeys for over 5 years. She enjoys guiding and supporting families through the exciting and sometimes overwhelming experience of pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum.

Originally from Delray Beach, FL. Simone has been residing in Brooklyn for the past 11 years. Her training and experience have helped her become a culturally competent doula who can connect with families from diverse backgrounds.

Simone is a proud mother of two sons, Hetep and PJ, aged 8 and 13 respectively, and she is committed to helping families transition into a new phase smoothly.

In addition to her doula work, Simone loves dancing, nurturing her plant collection, spending time with friends and family, and exploring new places in the city. She is passionate about empowering women and their partners to make informed decisions during their perinatal journey, and she strives to provide a safe and nurturing space for her clients to ask questions, express concerns, and share their stories.

Simone is an advocate for reproductive rights and black maternal health, and she believes that every family deserves access to quality and compassionate care during their perinatal journey.

PANELIST BIOGRAPHY



ABOUT

TRIXIE KIOKO-KAMPS

Trixie Kioko-Kamps

is a midwife, mother, and novice beekeeper. Her first birth, the homebirth of her daughter in Vermont, was the catalyzing moment for her journey into midwifery.

After several years as a Labor & Delivery Nurse, Trixie began practicing as a midwife in a profession with a very small number of Black midwives. Her focus is on the integrity, safety, and sanctity of the birthing person's experience. She conceives of her midwifery work as extending beyond catching babies. Being a Black midwife is part of the Black Lives Matter movement.

PANELIST BIOGRAPHY

ABOUT

DR. SHAREE LIVINGSTON



Dr. Sharee Livingston

is a board-certified Ob/Gyn in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania (PA), and after 17 years of practicing medicine, she has seen the direct impact of health disparities on Black communities.

She is wholly invested in eliminating health disparities and decreasing maternal morbidity and mortality in pregnant people of color. Dr. Livingston is committed to identifying and dismantling systemic contributors to these health disparities.

In addition to her clinical practice, she is a founding board member of Patients R Waiting (PRW) and Co-founder of the Diversifying Doulas Initiative (DDI). Our mission at PRW is to eliminate health disparities by increasing diversity in medicine. The Diversifying Doulas Initiative aims to decrease maternal morbidity and mortality by diversifying the perinatal workforce and providing full-scope doula care in vulnerable communities.

PANELIST BIOGRAPHY



ABOUT

EBONY PITTS

Ebony Pitts

is a Public Health Education Program and Outreach Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Department of Health. She dedicates her time curating COVID-19 educational materials for migrant workers and other underserved communities.

Additionally, she spent the last three years as a doula and assisting Black women in childbirth. She educates women and their families about preventative measures they should take to reduce birth complications and help them obtain the birthing experience they desire.

She also teaches women and their families about how to advocate for themselves in the healthcare system during and after their birthing experience. While she does not actively assist in delivering babies at the moment, she still promotes health education and encourages pregnant people to learn about their birthing options, so they can be in control of their own birthing experience.

PANELIST BIOGRAPHY



ABOUT MEGAN SIMMONS

Megan Simmons

is the Director of Policy for the National Birth Equity Collaborative. Ms. Simmons' education in Women's Studies and Political Science was the catalyst for her career in legal compliance, policy, and advocacy work.

She has served as a Federal Agent and was tasked with investigating sexual assault for the Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS). She was also collaterally tasked with representing law enforcement on various committees, including holistic approaches to combating violence against women attached to the Naval installations.

She later earned a law degree wherein she combined her education and her experience by contributing to policy that materially impacts the lives of women and the execution of investigations into allegations of sexual misconduct within higher education. Ms. Simmons has conducted various trainings on sexual harassment awareness, Equal Employment Opportunity, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. She spends her spare time cooking, bike riding, and reading.

PROFESSOR BIOGRAPHIES



ANDREA FLYNN

PopFam Professor

Andrea Flynn is the Senior Fellow of Health Equity at the Maven Collaborative. She is the co-author of *The Hidden Rules of Race* (Cambridge University Press, 2017) and she frequently writes and speaks about the race and gender dimensions of economic inequality, reproductive health and justice, and health equity. Her writing has appeared in *The Washington Post*, *The Atlantic*, *Ms. Magazine*, *The New Republic*, *Time*, *Teen Vogue*, and *Cosmopolitan*. Her research has examined the legacy and impact of gendered racism in our economy and the role of economic policy in driving racial and gender health disparities.

Andrea teaches courses on reproductive and sexual health, public policy, and economic inequality at the Mailman School for Public Health at Columbia University. She received her MPA and MPH from Columbia University and her BA in journalism and women's studies from Syracuse University. She was recently elected to the school board in her district in Westchester, NY.



LATANYA MAPP FRETT

PopFam Professor

Latanya Mapp Frett is President and CEO of Global Fund for Women and serves on the Board of Directors for Global Fund for Women and Global Fund for Women UK. Previously, she was the Executive Director of Planned Parenthood Global, the international arm of Planned Parenthood Federation of America. Ms. Frett worked eight years as a human rights officer for the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and 10 years with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

An attorney by training, she began her career at the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund in Washington, DC. Ms. Frett currently serves on the Board of Directors at Oxfam America and Management Sciences for Health and is an Adjunct Professor at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in government and politics, a master's in public policy, and a JD from the University of Maryland.

ORGANIZATIONS

- **Black Mamas Matter Alliance**
- **Black Women's Health Imperative**
- **Evidence-Based Birth**
- **Health In Her Hue** - a streamlined platform to find Black healthcare providers
- **HealthConnect One**
- **In Our Own Voice: National Black Women's Reproductive Justice Agenda**
- **National Black Doulas Association** - Black doula registry and offers doula training and certification
- **New York Midwives**
- **Oula Health** - modern maternity care center with focuses on obstetrics and midwifery care
- **Sista Midwife Productions** - a platform to find Black midwives, doulas, lactation, and wellness support
- **The Black Maternal Health Caucus**
- **The Educated Birth**
- **The National Birth Equity Collaborative**

NYC BASED DOULA ORGANIZATIONS

- **Ancient Song Doula Services** (serves clients in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens)
- **By My Side Birth Support Program** (low-cost doula services and free doula services for Medicaid recipients living in Central Brooklyn)
- **Caribbean Women's Health Association** (serves clients in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens)
- **Community Health Center of Richmond** (serves clients in Staten Island)
- **Hope and Healing Family Center** (serves Brooklyn clients)
- **Mama Glow Foundation** (serves clients in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens)
- **Northern Manhattan Perinatal Partnership** (serves clients in the Bronx and Manhattan)
- **NYC Birth Village**
- **NYC Doula Collective**
- **The Bridge Directory**
- **The Brooklyn Perinatal Network**
- **The Mothership** (serves Manhattan clients)
- **The New York Doula**



SOCIAL MEDIA

Below you will find key hashtags identified by the Black Mamas Matter Alliance in their [social media toolkit](#), as well as some sample Twitter posts and infographics that can be shared on your social media pages to amplify awareness surrounding Black maternal health.

Key Hashtags

#BMHW23

#BlackMamasMatter

#BlackMaternalHealthWeek

#ReproJustice

#ENDMaternalMortality

Secondary Hashtags

#BirthJustice

#MaternalEquity

#BlackMaternalHealth

#BirthEquity

#BlackWomenLead

#BlackJoy

Twitter Accounts to Follow:

@birthequity

@Blkmamasmatter

@SisterSong_WOC

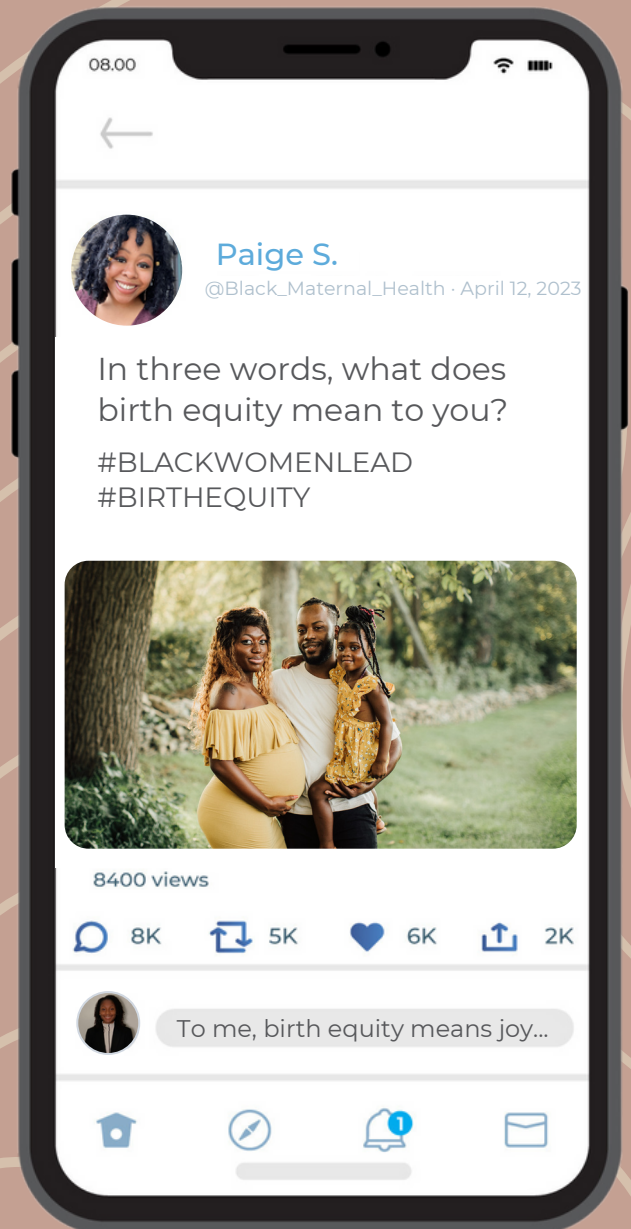
@BMHCaucus

@Blkwomenshealth

@BlkFemFund

@blkfemfuture

@everymomcounts



SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

BIRTH EQ·UI·TY

NOUN

The assurance of the conditions of optimal births for all people with a willingness to address racial and social inequalities.

#BIRTHEQUITYPROJECT

**BLACK DOULAS MATTER.
BLACK DOULAS MATTER.
BLACK DOULAS MATTER.
BLACK DOULAS MATTER.
BLACK DOULAS MATTER.
BLACK DOULAS MATTER.
EXPAND ACCESS NOW.**

#BIRTHEQUITYPROJECT

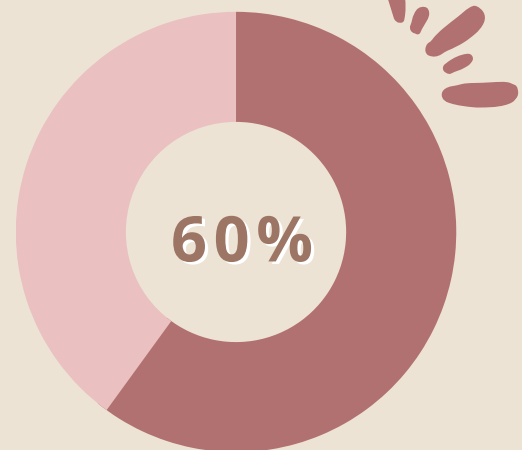
THE HARD FACTS

**BLACK MOTHERS
ARE MORE LIKELY TO DEVELOP
POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION**

**BLACK BABIES
ARE 2X MORE LIKELY TO DIE
THAN WHITE BABIES**

**BLACK WOMEN
ARE 3-4X MORE LIKELY TO DIE
THAN WHITE WOMEN**

#BIRTHEQUITYPROJECT



**of pregnancy-related deaths
are PREVENTABLE**

#BIRTHEQUITYPROJECT

Feel free to screenshot and post these images to your socials using the Birth Equity Project hashtags.

READING LIST

1. MEDIA TO WATCH

- All My Babies directed by George C. Stoney
- Belly of the Beast directed by Erika Cohn
- Birthing Justice directed by Monique N. Mathews
- Giving Birth in America created by Every Mother Counts + CNN
- High Risk: Black Mothers Protecting Themselves and Their Babies directed by Born Logic Allah
- The Naked Truth ep. 16: "Death by Delivery" directed by Lyttanya Shannon

2. BOOKS TO READ

- Birthing Liberation: How Reproductive Justice Can Set Us Free by Sabia Wade
- Everyday Feminist by Latanya Mapp Frett
- How We Get Free: Black Feminism and the Combahee River Collective edited by Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor
- Intimate Justice: The Black Female Body and the Body Politic by Shatema Threadcraft
- Killing the Black Body by Dorothy Roberts
- Listen to Me Good: The Story of an Alabama Midwife by Margaret Charles Smith and Linda Janet Holmes
- Pushed: The Painful Truth About Childbirth and Modern Maternity Care by Jennifer Block
- Reproductive Rights and Wrongs by Betsy Hartmann
- So We Can Know: Writers of Color on Pregnancy, Loss, Abortion + Birth edited by Aracelis Girmay
- Take My Hand by Dolen Perkins-Valdez
- The Hidden Rules of Race: Barriers to an Inclusive Economy by Andrea Flynn
- Undivided Rights: Women of Color Organizing for Reproductive Justice by Marlene Gerber Fried, Elena Guitierrez, Loretta Ross, Jael Silliman
- Women, Race, and Class by Angela Davis

3. PODCASTS TO LISTEN TO

- A Tribe Called Fertility
- Birth Stories in Color hosted by Laurel Gourrier and Danielle Jackson
- Black Maternal Health hosted by Josephine Pugh and Russia Chavis
- Dem Black Mamas by Crystal Tennille Irby, Nekisha Killings, Thea Monyee
- Homecoming Podcast hosted by Chae Pounds and Isis Rose
- Intersectionality Matters by Kimberle Crenshaw
- Maternal Health Innovation presented by the Maternal Health Learning & Innovation Center
- NATAL
- Well Worth Watering hosted by Lou-Ann Wattley Belk
- Why Race Matters S1, EP 6: Maternal Health and Birth Equity hosted by PBS Wisconsin

4. ARTICLES TO VIEW

- COVID Worsened a Health Crisis Among Pregnant Women by Roni Caryn Rabin
- Eliminating Obstetric Racism: One Black Birth at a Time
- How the Myth of Black hyper-fertility harms us by Edna Bonhomme
- Medical Racisms Role in the Recent Spike in Maternal Mortality by Margo Snipe
- Speaking Up Without Tearing Down by Loretta Ross
- Translating the theory of intersectionality into quantitative and mixed methods for empirical gender transformative research on health by Anne E. Fehrenbacher and Dhara Patel



PROJECT EVOLUTION

During our time at Mailman, we have had limited opportunities to discuss Black maternal health unless it was driven by our individual academic pursuits, and these efforts were unable to inspire more extensive discussions among our peers. Additionally, there is a lack of courses that focus on Black maternal and reproductive health from the domestic perspective.

For Black students at Mailman, many joined public health to address health issues and inequities specific to the Black community, yet our coursework did not create opportunities to advance these efforts in regard to maternal health. It is our hope that through the Birth Equity Project, we can implement a future course that places Black maternal health at the center to develop meaningful solutions to rectify health inequities while honoring the contributions of those in the past.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, we would like to thank our panelists, OB/GYN Dr. Sharee Livingston, midwife Trixie Kioko-Kamps, doula Ebony Pitts and Simone Colbert, and Megan Simmons, Director of Policy at the National Birth Equity Collaboration, for participating in our panel and sharing their insights towards improving Black maternal outcomes. A special thank you to our professors Latanya Mapp Frett and Andrea Flynn for their guidance and involvement in the Birth Equity Project.

A special thank you to our friends and family for their support, especially Jordan Sentino, who designed this toolkit. Finally, we'd like to thank Gaby Dominguez and the Columbia University Social Justice Mini-Grant fund for supporting this work!

THANKS

Thank you for participating in the Birth Equity Project. We hope you found our events illuminating and engaging. It is also our hope you found this toolkit informative and that these materials will aid you in your journey to become a maternal health advocate.

Black Maternal Health Week begins April 11, 2023, and will continue until April 17, 2023: be sure to make your voice heard on why you support advancements within Black Maternal Health.



LISTEN

Listen to the Birth Equity Project Playlist here to empower and inspire!

SCAN HERE

Scan the QR Code for Project references



This toolkit has been designed using images from Flaticon.com