



ESTHER BUSH

## Racism and Health

These monthly pages focus on health disparities in the Pittsburgh region. They aim to educate readers about key health issues, research opportunities and community resources. All articles can be accessed online at the New Pittsburgh Courier website ([newpittsburghcourier.com](http://newpittsburghcourier.com)). The monthly series is a partnership of the New Pittsburgh Courier, Community PARTners (a core service of the University of Pittsburgh's Clinical and Translational Science Institute—CTSI), Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh and UPMC Center for Engagement and Inclusion.

This month's "Take Charge of Your Health Today" page focuses on racism and health—understanding how both race and racism relate to poor health outcomes for Black, Latinx, Hispanic and other communities of color. We will also share the range of resources available here in Allegheny County. Erricka Hager and Bee Schindler, community engagement coordinators, CTSI, and Esther L. Bush, president and CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, spoke about this topic.

**EH:** Happy Black History Month, Ms. Bush. This is one of my favorite times of the year. My children were born in February, and we're celebrating our heritage. But our story also carries painful reminders of the historic journey of African Americans.

**EB:** I know what you are saying, Erricka. Black History Month gives us an opportunity to share our history and the amazing contributions we have made to society. But it is also important to acknowledge negative things in our past that are still affecting our present—for example, the legacy of the Tuskegee Study and how it understandably causes Black people not to want to participate in research. Sadly, African Americans continue to experience health disparities in some cases because their specific health differences and needs are not known. Research participation can help in those cases.

**BS:** Yes, Ms. Bush. This is just one example of how racism influences outcomes just as it influences policies. Inequitable policies foster mistreatment of people not only in health care but also in education, housing, employment, criminal justice and other systems that—not surprisingly—add up to significant negative health effects as well.

**EB:** That is a concise explanation of the cycle of oppression and its effects. It is important for us to raise awareness within the health community and to help researchers understand their roles in the continuation or elimination of this cycle. But, Erricka and Bee, during this Black History Month, we can celebrate our partnership as a solid step toward healing the relationship between health researchers and the African American community.

**EH:** Yes, this health page gives us the opportunity to publicly discuss critical topics like race and health disparities. We are here to nurture understanding and trust and to help both sides work together for the improved health and well-being of Pittsburgh communities.

**EB:** That's the power of a partnership between an academic space and a community organization like the Urban League. Community organizations have been doing this work forever. Researchers can change the system by partnering with, listening to and believing communities. Are there any resources that we can recommend for our readers to continue to learn more about how race and racism affect our overall lives?

**EH:** Yes. We have included a few additional resources on this page that are great starting points for readers who are interested in getting involved with research. The list also includes community organizations that are doing amazing work in interrupting cycles of oppression.

**BS:** Thank you so much for having this conversation with us, Ms. Bush, about racism and how it influences health outcomes. I look forward to next month as we discuss Down syndrome.

# Take charge of your health today. Be informed. Be involved.



## 'Advancing Just Health For All'

Studies have shown that racism and prejudice have contributed to racial gaps in health, education, economic stability and housing. Healthy People 2020 is the federal government's "road map" agenda for building a healthier nation. The statement of our nation's health recognizes racial discrimination as a social determinant of health that contributes to those racial gaps. Healthy People 2020 describes social determinants of health as conditions in the environments in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning and quality-of-life outcomes and risks.

Advocates are urging health professionals to clearly acknowledge that race and racism play a role in health status and social equity well-being. However, before we ask health professionals to examine their own role in improving the health of populations through achieving racial equity in health, we must first acknowledge past and present policies.

Noble Maseru, PhD, MPH, professor of behavioral and community health sciences, associate dean for diversity and inclusion, Office of the Dean, Graduate School of Public Health, and director, Center for Health Equity, University of Pittsburgh, quotes the Sankofa Bird, "If you want to know your present conditions, look at your past. If you want to know your future, look at your present actions," as a reminder.

Historical policies have contributed to differences in housing, education, health care, employment, media, criminal justice, and other systems. Dr. Maseru urges people to look to the past with a health equity lens. Anthony Iton, MD, JD, MPH, senior vice president for health communities with the California Endowment and health equity expert, advises that people need to "...fully illuminate the powerful relationship between social inequities and health inequities."

Despite not being a native of Pittsburgh, Dr. Maseru was intrigued by Pitt Public Health's commitment to acknowledging its historical wrongdoings. Pitt Public Health



NOBLE MASERU, PhD, MPH

have the knowledge and the resources to correct the deficiencies."

One of the ways that Pitt Public Health is addressing these deficiencies is through the community research advisory board (CRAB). CRAB is an initiative of the Center for Health Equity which is housed in Pitt's Graduate School of Public Health. "CRAB, established in 2001, has been advising academics, service providers, community-based organizations and not-for-profit organizations for almost two decades," says Dr. Maseru. "They educate about how best to engage vulnerable and historically under-represented populations in research. They also promote collaboration among those researchers interested in addressing health inequities and/or disparities."

CRAB is one way to bring attention to historical events, like the Tuskegee Study, and how they have changed the research process. CRAB also acknowledges that these events have contributed to people's limited participation in research.

"CRAB is the lone organization in Allegheny County that has a diverse membership," says Dr. Maseru. "It is made up of community-based persons, agency representatives, academics, service providers and students

who are experts in community-based participatory research."

CRAB is a space where people from underrepresented communities can share their experiences of discrimination throughout the research process. Members are encouraged to educate researchers on the best ways to partner with Black, Latinx, Hispanic or other communities of color. CRAB is also helping the not-for-profit and public sectors respond to changing federal demands. New federal requirements for research funding are asking organizations to include a health equity framework in their mission, needs assessment and community benefits agreements.

Dr. Maseru is confident about the future of Pitt Public Health. He envisions change occurring in multiple ways including expanding the reach of the school into the Pittsburgh area. He hopes to see the University of Pittsburgh become a top institution for health equity.

"To do this, we will establish deliberate cross-sector collaborations involving external communities and organizations, as well as internal partnerships with schools and departments across campus," says Dr. Maseru.

Pitt Public Health will continue to emphasize that health equity is a measure of social progress. This goal can be achieved only by using a Health Equity in All Policies framework. This approach is supported by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Office of the Associate Director for Policy and Strategy. Health equity in all policies is a joint approach that embeds health considerations in policymaking across all sectors. The overall goal is to improve the health and well-being of all. Dr. Maseru pledges to work with the public sector to find ways to improve population health. He would also like to continue to partner with community organizations to develop interventions that will improve the health of Pittsburgh residents.

"In doing the above, we carry out our vision...Advancing Just Health for All," says Dr. Maseru.

## Exploring Links Between Racism and Health

### Dinner and Dialogue Series

February 20, 2020

5:30-8 p.m.

RSVP by emailing [bos23@pitt.edu](mailto:bos23@pitt.edu) or calling 412-383-3701.

Please join in this free and open to the public dinner and dialogue series as a way to lift up the community voice alongside the academics presenting their research. We hope to create opportunities to co-create solutions and co-learn about the effects of racism on health and mental health. Specifically, we are hoping to discuss ways to address and reduce racial disparities.

#### Panelists:

As an Antiracist Integrative Raja Yoga Teacher, Felicia Savage Friedman is supporting ongoing antiracist organizing efforts in communities, organizations and institutions.

**Noble Maseru, PhD**, is a professor and director of the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health Center for Health Equity and associate dean for Diversity and Inclusion, Office of the Dean.

**James P. Huguley, PhD**, is interim director, Center on Race and Social Problems and assistant professor in the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work; his work focuses on school-based interventions that promote positive developmental outcomes for students of color, particularly in urban school settings.

**Cheryl Hall-Russell, PhD**, launched BW3 and excels as a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) consultant, speaker and facilitator. She specializes in cultural audits to prepare companies for the adoption of inclusionary and equitable practices.

**Chaunda Cunningham, LSW**, is the

Healthy Start Pittsburgh team lead for the Moving beyond Depression program that services in-home therapy for pregnant and postpartum mothers who are suffering from depression.

**Nicole Singletary** is director of in-home services at Healthy Start Pittsburgh.

**Ta'Lor Pinkston, MSW**, speaks and facilitates workshops that help women + femme (including transgender women and nonbinary individuals) know their worth, cope with their mental health issues and commit to Healing over Everything. She is a Moving beyond Depression therapist at Healthy Start Pittsburgh.

**Dawn Boggs, LPC, ICGC, CEAP** is the Senior EAP Consultant at BNY Mellon. She works with employees, managers and the company as a whole, to provide a positive and healthy workplace. In addition to working in corporations, she has worked in the non-profit, community college and private practice settings.

#### RESOURCES

**CRAB:** The Community Research Advisory Board (CRAB) was established in 2001 to advise researchers on how best to engage underrepresented populations in research and to foster collaboration among those populations and researchers interested in addressing health disparity.

**YogaRoots:** Felicia Savage Friedman and YogaRoots On Location's trained yoga teachers provide yoga-based techniques for people to manage the trauma and stress of their daily lives. [smile@yogarootsonlocation.com](mailto:smile@yogarootsonlocation.com)

**Healthy Start** touches the entire community—galvanized in support of a vision where communities are devoid of health disparities

and all babies have the opportunity to thrive. (412) 247-4009 | [info@hsipgh.org](mailto:info@hsipgh.org)

#### New Voices for Reproductive Justice:

Promotes the complete health and well-being of Black women and girls in the Greater Pittsburgh Region, Pennsylvania and Ohio. Reproductive Justice is our innovative framework to engage Black women, femmes and girls in local, national and global movement-building for Human Rights, Racial and Gender Justice. (412) 450-0290 | [info@newvoicespittsburgh.org](mailto:info@newvoicespittsburgh.org)

#### Pitt Center for Race and Social Problems:

Conducts applied social science research on race, color, ethnicity and their influence on the quality of life for all people in the United States. <http://crsp.pitt.edu/>

**The Pittsburgh Study:** The Pittsburgh Study is a community-partnered study to find out what works to help children thrive. The study will follow children in Allegheny County from birth through high school. Pregnant women, parents, babies, toddlers, preschoolers and children in elementary, middle and high school can participate in the study. 412-692-8026 | [mab472@pitt.edu](mailto:mab472@pitt.edu)

**All of Us:** The All of Us Research Program is asking one million people to come together to create the largest health database ever. Researchers can use this data to better understand disease. This may create a healthier future for generations to come. [allofuspa@pitt.edu](mailto:allofuspa@pitt.edu) | 1-800-664-0480

**Pitt+Me:** Answer a few questions and search studies you might be interested in. Find studies to join or become part of our pool of future participants. We will email you about studies for which you will be eligible. [Pittplusme.org](http://Pittplusme.org) | 1-866-438-8230