

FRAMEWORK TO ASSESS Racial Equity IN Policy Development

OUR COMMITMENT: The Maternal Mental Health Leadership Alliance (MMHLA) is committed to advancing racial equity in maternal mental health. In accordance with our goals, we convened a diverse and multidisciplinary Board of Advisors to provide guidance on how the organization can best incorporate principles of racial equity into policies, practice and advocacy.

HOW IT ENCOURAGES EQUITY

The framework encourages racial equity in policy development by:

- Centering the identity, experiences, and self-identified needs of people of color and those with lived experience by requiring the inclusion of these communities in decision-making processes.
- Encouraging thoughtful and thorough decision making that does not allow for the disregard of systemic racism and bias.

RACIAL DISPARITIES IN HEALTH

The primary purpose of this framework is to address racial disparities in maternal mental health. While the core concepts of this framework may be utilized to address other disparities, these efforts should not detract from this tool's primary focus of unearthing and addressing racial disparities in health. The rising tide of racial justice sets an excellent foundation for addressing additional health disparities.

ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK

The Board of Advisors met five times in 2021, with support from MMHLA's Board of Directors and MMHLA staff. The advice and recommendations of the advisors were used to develop the following framework, which is intended to be applied:

- In any case where MMHLA considers supporting an existing or proposed policy and
- To guide our own development of equitable, inclusive, and effective policies and initiatives.

TRUE EQUITY IS CONTINUOUS

Taken together, the elements of this framework will help MMHLA to mainstream principles of racial equity and apply them to make more effective policy decisions. This said, we acknowledge that true equity is not simply an outcome, but a continuous process. The foundations of this framework may be applied in consideration of additional health disparities (e.g. those driven by sexuality, gender, religion, disability, etc.).

When we eliminate racial disparities in health, a more just and supportive society is created where all individuals are free to live healthy and happy lives.



PATHWAY TO INEQUITIES™

Racism is the driving force of the social determinants of health and is pervasive in every system of our society.

Racism

Social Determinants of Health (Systems & Structures)

Racial Inequities

Health (and other) Disparities

Health Inequities

PATHWAY TO POLICY

Step 1 IDENTIFY THE POLICY

1

The first step in applying this framework is to identify the policy being assessed. The policy is then reviewed in consideration of the following:

- MMHLA's mission and vision.
- The problem the policy aims to solve.
- Who is engaged in promoting the policy and why.



Step 2 IDENTIFY & CENTER THE POPULATION

2

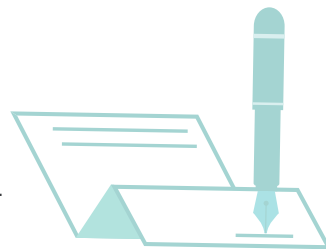
Next, MMHLA centers the population(s) of focus, gathering both quantitative and qualitative data, with a goal of understanding how systemic biases and structures shape health outcomes, beliefs and behaviors. We use an intersectional lens to consider both past and present instances of structural racism and bias, particularly in health care. MMHLA also prioritizes the lived experiences of those that have been affected by maternal mental health conditions, as well as research studies, statistics, and historical data.



Step 3 DESIGN THE POLICY

3

MMHLA uses the information gathered to craft a policy agenda based on the experience of the population(s) of focus. We aim to promote policies that reduce health inequities for mothers and birthing people with an emphasis on reducing structural inequities and racial bias. Further, MMHLA evaluates policy based on improving and advancing maternal mental health rather than supporting proposals that may not move the needle forward.



In this framework, policy or policies may refer to either governmental or institutional policies. Governmental policy includes laws and legislation put forth by local, state, or federal governing bodies. Institutional policy includes regulations and recommendations put forth by regulatory bodies such as government agencies and professional associations that are themselves subject to governmental policy. Such organizations might include the Centers for Disease Control (government agency) or the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (professional associations). Governmental and institutional policies are interconnected and should both be included in considerations of racial equity.