



Office of African American Health

LEGISLATIVE REPORT

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Office of African American Health (OAAH)

Minnesota Department of Health
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Background

The Office of African American Health (OAAH) was [established during the 2023 legislative session](#) to identify and address the root causes of health disparities disproportionately affecting African American Minnesotans. The mission of the office, as outlined by the legislature, is to develop solutions and systems to address the disparities rooted in cumulative and historical discrimination and disadvantages across various sector. These sectors include, but are not limited to, housing, education, employment, gun violence, incarceration, environmental factors, and health care discrimination.

In Minnesota, African Americans experience the highest disparities across nearly all categories, including homicide, maternal and infant mortality, homeownership rates, and more. These disparities create underlying influences on a person's physical health, which is often referred to as social determinants of health (SDOHs). Recognizing the urgent need to address these inequities, the Office of African American Health was created to spearhead targeted efforts.

The mission of the OAAH is being carried out through four key strategies:

1. **Administering the African American Health Special Emphasis Grant Program** to strategically invest grant dollars in the community.
2. **Convening the African American Health State Advisory Council** to develop policy and program recommendations for the Commissioner of Health.
3. **Coordinating policy and systems changes** in collaboration with the African American community and state agencies.
4. **Supporting agency work** that impacts the African American community via collaboration and co-creation with MDH divisions.

African American Health Special Emphasis Grant Program

In 2024, the Office of African American Health successfully launched its first grant program. The African American special emphasis grant is an annual \$1 million grant created to invest in community solutions that address the root causes of and reduce health disparities for African American Minnesotans. The grant duration is 4 years where the office will provide technical assistance and measure the impact the grant funds have on the health of community. All applicants for the special emphasis grant were to submit proposals for community-based projects that incorporated a multisector approach to addressing the social determinants of health. The social determinants of health focus areas outlined in the request for proposals were:

- Housing
- Education
- Employment
- Gun violence
- Environmental factors
- Criminal justice
- Food access
- Chronic disease
- Early childhood development
- Maternal health

The Office of African American Health hired four Grant Managers and One Division Director to carry out and oversee the grant administration. The office Grant Managers collaborated across the agency to ensure the RFP language was clear, culturally competent, and met MDH standards. The review process consisted of 3 different review groups; community reviewers, an OAAH grant team review, and a balance team review.

The office received 90 eligible applications requesting a total of \$31.3 million in grant funds. After a thorough review process, 14 projects were selected, and grant agreements were executed in June 2024.

African American Health Special Emphasis Grant Program Grantees

Seeds Worth Sowing

The Nurturing Homes Project is transforming the lives of pregnant and expecting parents in U.S.-born African American communities by addressing the intrinsic connection between housing stability and maternal health. Through stable housing support and empowering community-based childbirth education led by full-spectrum doulas, the program equips mothers with knowledge and tools for healthy childbirth and postpartum care, laying the foundation for long-term family well-being.

Snuggle House Foundation

The Community Empowerment for Better Births project is saving lives by addressing maternal and infant mortality. By providing culturally relevant training for community birth support professionals like doulas and lactation consultants, and offering comprehensive childbirth education through classes, group sessions, and online modules, the project ensures Black families have access to critical resources and support for safer births and healthier outcomes.

NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center

The African American Men's Project (AAMP) empowers men to overcome systemic barriers to employment, housing, and personal growth. By addressing root causes of inequity, the program helps participants achieve their goals, promoting community resilience and breaking cycles of disparity through structured support and mentorship.

Guns Down, Love Up

Through restorative justice partnerships and community healing events, the Youth Council offers a lifeline to families and communities affected by gun violence. By raising awareness and fostering collective healing, the program works to reduce violence and its devastating impact on African American youth and their communities.

Community Partnership Collaborative 2.0

CPC2.0's "Tailor-Made Case Management Program" provides holistic support to those impacted by gun violence, offering services such as health insurance applications, furniture referrals, and access to household essentials. This comprehensive approach fosters stability and healing within the community insurance.

Food Trap Project Initiative

Combating food insecurity, the Food Trap Project delivers free, plant-based food and fresh produce through a centrally located bodega, ensuring accessible nutrition for African American communities. By addressing diet-related illnesses, the initiative promotes health equity and community well-being.

Health Equity Network dba Healthy Alliances Matter All

Health Equity Northland transforms lives by growing and distributing healthy, culturally relevant produce. The program supports African American communities in Duluth with fresh food access, wellness checks for seniors, and a hands-on approach to nutritional empowerment.

Network for the Development of Children of African Descent

NdCAD's Sankofa Reading Program nurtures literacy and cultural identity among African American students, building reading confidence and engaging parents through advocacy training. By fostering educational excellence and parental involvement, the program creates a strong foundation for future success.

The BrandLab

The BrandLab is reshaping the marketing and advertising industry by equipping African American youth with the skills, internships, and professional development needed to thrive in creative careers. By diversifying the industry, the program opens doors to high-growth opportunities.

30,000K

The Tech Geeks program propels African American youth in Ramsey County's justice-involved population into high-earning technology careers. Through practical computer science education and paid employment opportunities, the program empowers participants to break free from cycles of poverty.

African American Survivor Services

This initiative connects individuals with substance use disorders to harm reduction services, medication-assisted treatment, and supportive housing. By meeting people where they are, the program provides critical pathways to recovery and stability in the African American community.

Divine Konnections

The Divine Haven project creates a healing space for young African American mothers in Duluth, providing access to Black therapists, healthcare advocacy, and resources for stable homes. This initiative strengthens family units and empowers mothers to build secure futures for their children.

Morning Glory Montessori

Faith, Afrocentric, and Montessori (F.A.M.) pedagogy is revolutionizing early childhood education for African American boys. By fostering a sense of belonging and emphasizing cultural identity, the program ensures children thrive academically and socially in an environment designed for them.

Solid Roots

The Nourishing the Connections program enriches the mother-child bond through workshops on mental wellness, financial literacy, and career exploration. By supporting mothers with essential life skills, the program strengthens family units and promotes long-term stability.

Each Grant Manager is assigned grantees to support throughout the life of the grant. The technical assistance provided will vary from grantee to grantee, but the central focus is capacity building and community empowerment. The Grant Managers have facilitated invoice training, connected grantees with other community resources, fostered partnership and collaboration among the grantee cohort and supported each grantee with navigating the MDH systems. The pipeline created will allow for more of the work being carried out by community-based organizations to be amplified to the Commissioner and subsequently, the legislators. Bi-weekly office hours are held to provide technical assistance and create a learning community among the grantees. Topics covered during the office hours range from navigating the process of applying for government funds, terminology 101, understanding grant language, compliance and more. The goal of this effort is to build the grantees' knowledge and capacity in government-community relations. Grant Managers also conduct monthly check-ins and quarterly site visits to ensure grantees feel supported and have access to any resource they need.

African American Health State Advisory Council

The African American Health State Advisory Council was convened in July 2024 after being approved during the 2023 legislative session. There are five key strategies for the council:

- **Identifying Disparities:** Recognizing health disparities and their contributing factors within African American communities.
- **Policy Recommendations:** Advising the commissioner on statutes, rules, and policies to address these disparities.
- **Strategy Development:** Proposing policies and strategies to improve African American health.
- **Work Groups:** Establishing work groups of service providers, recipients, and advocacy representatives with clear guidelines and objectives.
- **Annual Reporting:** Submitting an annual report to the commissioner summarizing activities, identifying health disparities, and offering recommendations to address them.

The council is comprised of representatives of community-based organizations serving or advocating for African American citizens, at-large community leaders or elders, as nominated by other council members, African American individuals who provide and receive health care services, African American secondary or college students, health or human service professionals serving African American communities or clients, representatives with research or academic expertise in racial equity, and other members that the Commissioner and/or Governor deem appropriate to facilitate the goals and duties of the council. There are two vacant seats that will be filled by youth students under the age of 25.

Council Members			
Abdou Manjang	Andrea Lawson*	Dr. Brittany Lewis	Carolyn Livingston
Charles Dixon	Christopher Smith	Cindy Devonish	Patrick Ingram*
Paul May-Kramer	Pleasant Radford jr.	Rae Blaylark	Ronda Chakolis

*Denotes co-chairs

Since the establishment of the African American Health State Advisory Council, the group has been able to meet once per month. One member of the Office of African American Health serves as the liaison for the council and MDH. This team member schedules full council meetings, meets bi-weekly with co-chairs, and supports the communication and organizational tasks of the council. The council has successfully selected co-chairs, engaged with Paths to Black Health grantees, drafted a charter, and established committees in its five months of operation.

Conclusion

The Office of African American Health has achieved many accomplishments in a short amount of time. The office has been successful in executing grants, convening the advisory council, collaborating with other MDH divisions and areas, kickstarting strategic planning in alignment with MDH, and grounding staff in the first year of operation. The office will continue to advance equity, emphasizing the African American community, and work to address health disparities.

Appendix

MN Office of African American Health Statute: [Sec. 144.0754 MN Statutes](#)

[African American Health State Advisory Council Statute: Sec. 144.0755 MN Statutes](#)

[African American Health Special Emphasis Grant Program: Sec. 144.0756 MN Statutes](#)