

# **CENTERING *BLACK* MOTHERS, BIRTHING PEOPLE, BABIES, AND FAMILIES**

Presented by Yazmin Bennett-Kelly, BIRTH Initiative Director  
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## **Healthy Start Pittsburgh** (Est. 1991)

**The MISSION of Healthy Start** is to improve maternal and child health and to reduce poor birth outcomes and infant mortality in Allegheny County.

Healthy Communities  
**Healthy Families**  
**Healthy Babies**  
**Healthy Start**



# Healthy Start Pittsburgh (Est. 1991)

**EQUITY STATEMENT:** *In support of our mission Healthy Start is committed to applying a racial equity lens to address disparities in maternal and child health outcomes that are experienced by Black families in Allegheny County.*

*According to Race Forward, a social justice organization that works across communities most affected by systemic racism to build collective power for racial equity, racial equity is a process of eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone. It is the intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems, and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color.*





# Allegheny County **BIRTH** Plan for Black Babies and Families:

Battling Inequities & Realizing  
Transformational Health Outcomes





**Locally, data directs us to focus on outcomes and disparities experienced by Black women and babies**

## The State of Black Maternal and Infant Health in Allegheny County:

- The infant mortality rate among Black infants is more than **four times** higher than among white infants.
- The maternal mortality rate for Black mothers is higher in Pittsburgh than in **97** percent of similar cities.
- Black women and birthing people in Allegheny County have **nearly twice** the proportion of pre-term births and over twice the proportion of low-birth weight babies compared to white women and birthing people.



# Three Agreements:

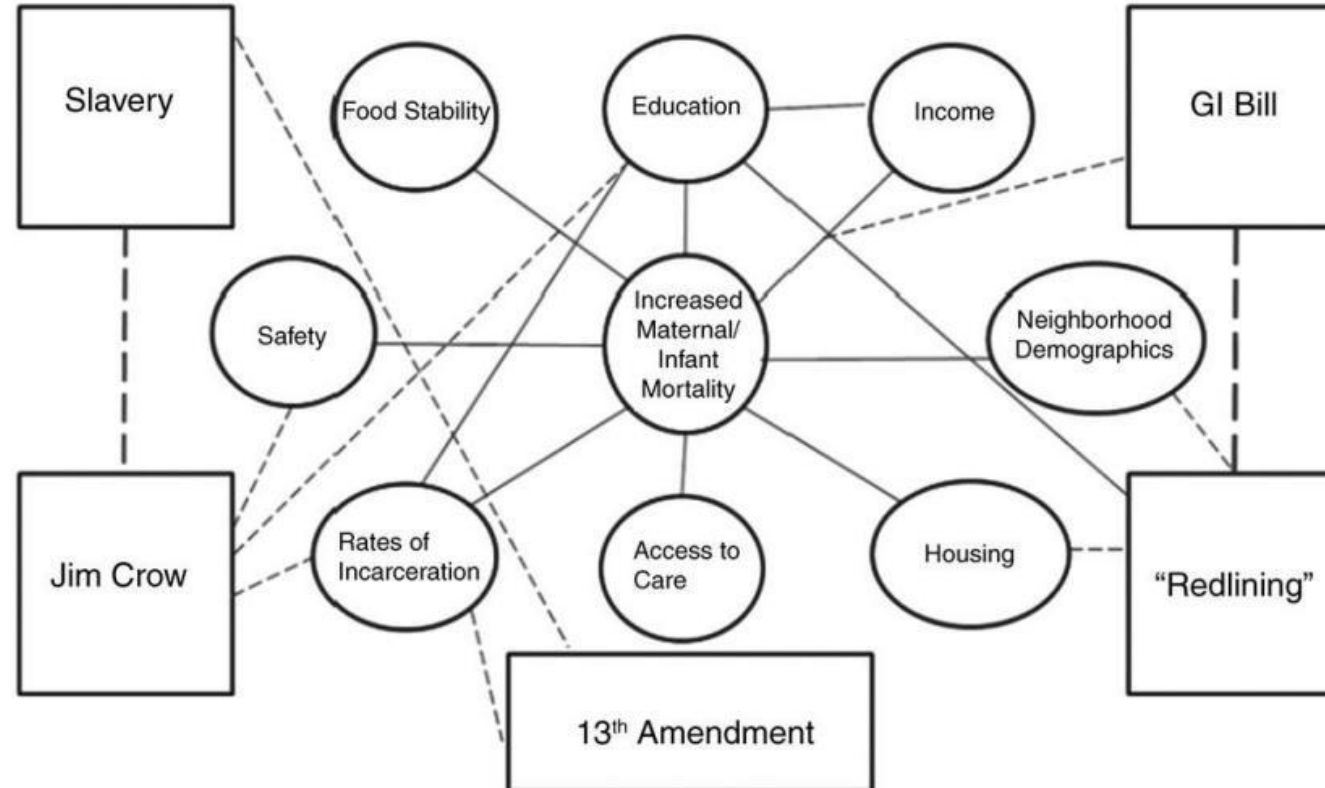
1. Stay engaged.
2. Experience discomfort.
3. Expect/accept non-closure.





# Racism as a Determinant of Health

## WEB OF CAUSATION STRUCTURAL and SOCIAL DETERMINANTS: IMPACT ON HEALTH



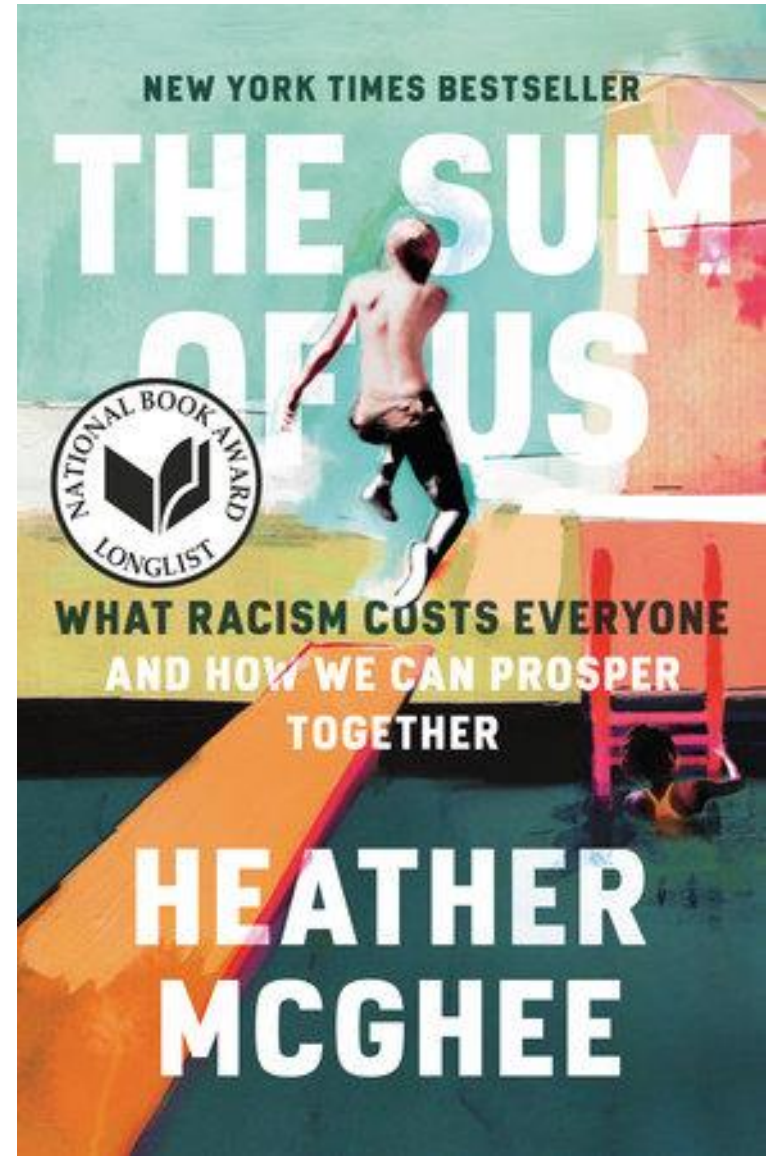


# Racism

**“Racism is defined by Dr. Camara Phyllis Jones as “a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which is what we call “race”), that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources.”**



**As activist and social economist Heather McGhee and others have demonstrated, racism and its impact on our policies and communities costs everyone.**



McGhee, H. (2022). *The sum of us: What racism costs everyone and how we can prosper together*. Profile Books Ltd.



# The BIRTH Plan: Created for and with Black mothers



Community input was sought and incorporated at multiple stages of the process including:

1. Research projects.
2. A town hall event.
3. Input surveys.
4. Public input sessions.





# Key themes from community input include:



- More MCH workers that are Black and are from their communities.
- Greater compassion, cultural humility, and a warmer bedside manner from MCH workers.
- More accessible mental health support.
- Paid leave for all parents.
- Greater access to nutritious food.
- More accessible and affordable childcare options.



# Action Areas



## Strengthen the MCH Workforce

*This action area is focused on strengthening the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Workforce, which includes doulas, lactation support, childbirth educators, community health workers, midwives, mental health professionals, nurses, physician assistants, physicians, and other workers that support the health and well-being of birthing families.*



## Strengthen Systems of Care

*This action area is focused on strengthening systems of care. MCH systems of care include the healthcare system, public health system, social services, family support services, and other community supports and services that aid birthing families and families with children.*



## Address Social Determinants of Health

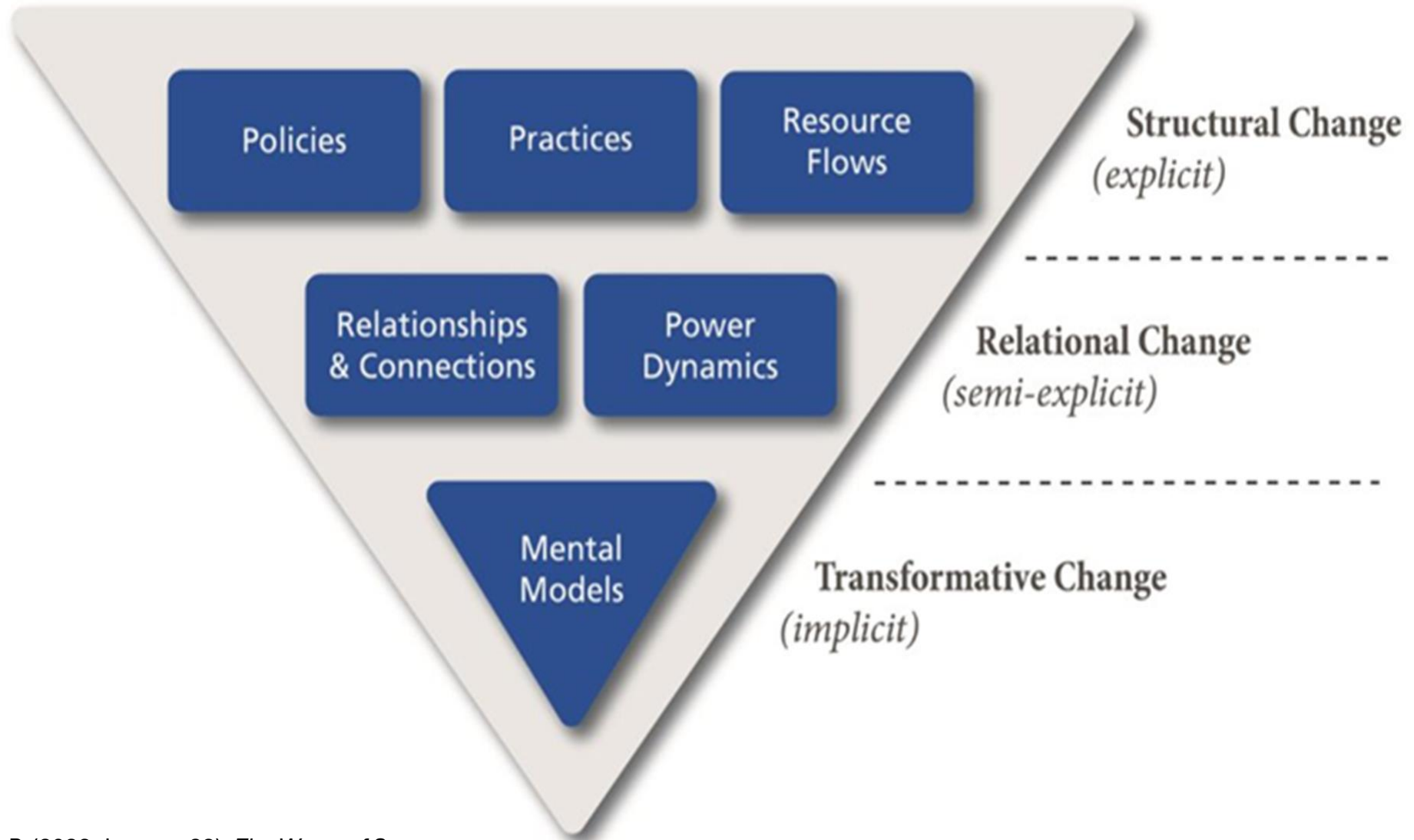
*This action area is focused on addressing social determinants of health, which are defined by the World Health Organization as “the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life.”*



## Coordinate and Streamline MCH Activities



## Six Conditions of Systems Change







PoP Health



The Center For Parents & Children



# Implementation Partners



Trying  
together



# The Vision

Maternal and infant *vitality* in the Black community.

- Food security.
- Affordable and accessible childcare.
- Affordable/accessible and reliable transportation.
- Parent supportive workplace policies and environments.
- Anti-racist healthcare providers.
- Livable wages.





# References.

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- Jones, C. P. (2018). Toward the science and practice of anti-racism: Launching a national campaign against racism. *Ethnicity & Disease, 28*(Supp 1), 231. <https://doi.org/10.18865/ed.28.s1.231>
- Kania, J., Kramer, M., & Senge, P. (2023, January 23). *The Water of Systems Change*. FSG. [https://www.fsg.org/resource/water\\_of\\_systems\\_change/](https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/)
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**THANK YOU!**

**Any questions?**

Yazmin Bennett-Kelly  
Director, BIRTH Initiative  
(412) 760-3570  
ybkelly@hsipgh.org

**READ THE BIRTH PLAN:**

