

Cross-sector Innovation Initiative Profile: Mountain Area Health Education Center (NC)

Project Title and Tagline

Mothering Asheville – A community-centered health movement to address institutional racism, implicit bias, access to care and social determinants of health as root causes of birth inequities. #WeAreMotheringAsheville

Project Summary

Partners connected to Mothering Asheville and Buncombe County's Community Health Improvement Process (CHIP) seek to increase and align cross-sector collaboration to reduce racial inequities in birth outcomes and infant mortality by 2027. While CHIP and Mothering Asheville have collaborative bodies working to address this issue, additional funding to align and increase cross-sector collaboration would increase the effectiveness of the program and increase the likelihood of significantly reducing racial disparities. This project seeks to do that by inviting potential community partners who are separately working to decrease racial inequities to be part of our movement, authentically engaging communities most impacted by these inequities in reviewing and co-designing upstream and downstream solutions, increasing awareness in the general community regarding the scope of the problem and root causes through community engagement and data visualization, and by developing short- and long-term funding strategies to significantly change the systems that create these inequities.

Community Description

Buncombe County is located in Western North Carolina on land originally within the boundaries of the Cherokee Nation. It has a total population of 238,318 (2010 Census), with 88.8% identifying as White, 6.3% Black or African American, 6.4% Hispanic or LatinX, 2.3% Two or More Races, 1.2% Asian, 0.4% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. 18.8% of the population is under the age of 18 and 19.4% is over the age of 65. 24.1% of the population lives in a rural setting.

According to the 2018 rankings, Buncombe County is #14 among the 100 NC counties for overall Health Outcomes; this measure includes premature death rates as well as the number of days residents reported experiencing poor health. Buncombe County also ranked 3rd for Clinical Care, 23rd for Length of Life, 10th for Quality of Life, and 8th for Social and Economic Factors. Consistently a top performer in the County Health Rankings, Buncombe County overall stands out for excellent health care. These data do not reflect the experience of all residents and families in Buncombe County. There are huge health disparities among communities of color with the premature death rate among Black residents (10,800) being nearly 1.5 times that of White residents (7,400) and the average life expectancy for Black residents (70 years old) being five years shorter than for White residents (74 years old). Racial inequities also exist in the percent of families of color experiencing poverty and low-wealth with 12% of White children experiencing poverty, 31% of Black children and 41% of Hispanic children. Buncombe County also experiences a high level of racial segregation, with a Black/White segregation index of 51 out of 100, the 9th highest in the state of North Carolina. The continuing impact of structural racism and historical Jim Crow laws is evident in the health and economic inequities experienced by people of color in our community.

Key to the focus of the collaborative work is understanding the impact of structural racism on infant mortality and birth outcomes. The total five-year infant mortality rate in Buncombe County has remained fairly steady over the past decade, with a current rate of 6.4 infant deaths per 1,000 live births; however, there are persistent and increasing inequities by race/ethnicity in this and other critical birth outcomes and correlated determinants. In 2017, the five-year infant mortality inequity ratio between Blacks and Whites in Buncombe County was 3.8, a drastic increase from 1.6 in 2013.

Expected Impact on Systems Alignment, Population Health, and Health Equity

We aim to support cross-sector collaboration to undo racism across systems through improved sharing and use of racial injustice data, exploring story, aligning strategies and igniting community action. Mothering Asheville's long-term vision is that by 2027 inequities in infant mortality in Buncombe County will be eliminated. This project will ground our cross-sector data sharing process in the voice of the community, lift up the expertise of collaborative partners and impacted community members, and directly engage impacted community members in decision making and designing solutions. We expect participation in the project learning community will assist us in applying emerging best practices and build our capacity to attract future funding and gain financial support for continued work. Specifically, we expect to increase the number of impacted community members directly involved in decision-making regarding our collaborative birth equity and racial justice work; increase community participation in the data sharing process, analysis and use for co-designing upstream/downstream solutions; and move towards system alignment in how we distribute grant funding by sharing funding across partners in recognition of shared expertise, including the expertise of impacted community members, and using a small pot of money as an "Innovation Fund."

Key Partners

- Asheville Buncombe Institute for Parity Achievement (ABIPA)
- Buncombe County Department of Health and Human Services (BC DHHS)
- Mothering Asheville
- North Carolina Center for Health and Wellness (NCCHW)
- YWCA of Asheville

Grantees are working toward population health and health equity priorities, as well as addressing one or more pillars of alignment (as indicated by a checkmark below).

Population Health and Health Equity Focus

- Access to care
- Maternal, child and adolescent health
- Structural racism

Systems Alignment Areas

- Share a vision and a set of priority outcomes
- ✓ Create a shared data and measurement system
- ✓ Establish appropriate financing with incentives and accountability
- ✓ Strong governance with leadership and defined relationships driven by the voice and participation of community members

Cross-sector Innovation Initiative Overview

With funding from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Center for Sharing Public Health Services and the Public Health National Center for Innovations are co-leading the Cross-sector Innovation Initiative, a joint effort that aims to understand and support innovative multi-sector partnerships between public health, healthcare, and social services that ultimately transform practice towards working in alignment to improve population health, wellbeing, and equity for all.