



## ***Study Finds Major Gaps in Behavioral Health Care for BIPOC Ohioans***

*Media availability and press conference TODAY (02/21/23 - details below)*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**February 21, 2023**

**Columbus, OH** – Finding care for mental health or substance use disorders is a challenge for many people, but marginalized groups in Ohio have the added hurdle of locating someone that shares a similar racial and/or ethnic background. This is because there are not enough providers of color to serve these communities and the state needs to take action to make quality, culturally competent care more accessible.

“People must feel they are seen in order to feel welcome,” says Tracy Maxwell Heard, Executive Director of Multiethnic Advocates for Cultural Competence, Inc (MACC). “If they don’t feel welcomed, then they won’t approach for services. If they don’t approach for services, then they don’t receive treatment. If they don’t receive treatment, then they don’t recover. Representation also encourages trust – especially in Black communities that have trust issues based in historical abuse from the health sector.”

In the second release of a four-part landmark study, titled, ***Behavioral Health in Ohio: Improving Data, Moving Toward Racial and Ethnic Equity***, findings reveal that Ohio’s behavioral health workforce does not reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of the population. For example, 12.5% of Ohioans identify as Black, but according to available data from licensing boards, less than 5% of psychologists are Black.

“The data says it all,” says Joan Englund, Executive Director of the Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition (MHAC). “The disparity for racial and ethnic minorities is vast, especially in more rural areas of Ohio where behavioral health care support is already scarce.”

The report, which was conducted by a partnership among MHAC, Central State University (CSU), Multiethnic Advocates for Cultural Competence, Inc. (MACC), and Ohio University (OU) also outlines some of the actions that decisionmakers can begin to implement to address this disparity, including:

- Centering BIPOC voices and ideas in planning and decision making
- Improving collection and use of data on providers’ race, ethnicity, languages spoken, where they practice, and their specialties
- Requiring cultural competency training for existing and future providers, licensing boards, decision makers and client facing staff at all educational institutions and organizations providing behavioral health services
- Developing a pipeline for BIPOC to enter into and stay in behavioral health careers by introducing opportunities to middle and high schoolers
- Establishing scholarships, paid internships, and other financial supports for students of color in higher education institutions

Tracy Plouck, Assistant Clinical Professor at Ohio University, says, "The information contained in this report will help Governor DeWine's Administration and the Ohio General Assembly make informed decisions regarding the development of a more robust and equitable behavioral health workforce."

Knowing that there is a significant gap between the number of existing behavioral health professionals of color and the number needed, a collaborative effort is necessary to address it. Importantly, people of color must be the ones identifying what the problems are as well as approaches for addressing them.

"It has been a true pleasure to be a part of REBH (Racial and Ethnic Equity in Behavioral Health) project," shares Omesh Johar, Associate Professor of Psychology at Central State University. "Our work entails an objective approach to understanding equity and establishing a reference point to gauge progress made in the future."

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**Press Conference Details:**

**February 21, 2023 | 11:30 AM**

**Ohio Statehouse – Stateroom**

**1 Capitol Square, Columbus, OH 43215**

**Creative Assets:**

Executive Summary: [https://mhaadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ExecSum\\_R2.pdf](https://mhaadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/ExecSum_R2.pdf)

Link to study #2: <https://mhaadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Report-2.pdf>

Link to study # 1: <https://mhaadvocacy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Installment-1.pdf>

Link to Facebook Live of Press Conference (2/21): <https://www.facebook.com/MHAC.Ohio>

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