

2024 Black Leadership Advisory Council (BLAC)

Pulse Report

The Black Leadership Council Committee (BLAC) Subcommittee's Objective through a Pulse Report:

Under the direction of Dr. Samuel Hickson, the BLAC Subcommittee is working to address the issues that the Black community in Nevada faces by producing an extensive Pulse Report. The emphasis is on health equity, health care accessibility, and overall well-being. The report will identify important resources for improvement and offer recommendations based on facts.

Introducing the subject matters and input material through the sequence presented throughout the report is Dr. Samuel Hickson whose field of study as a Health Behaviorist and Social Worker has led to his position as a chair for the BLAC subcommittee.

In the subject matter of Health and Wellness the subject matter expert is Will Rucker participates in regional, state, and federal initiatives that promote social spiritual transformation in restorative justice, efforts centered on humanity first and health equity. Will has a master's degree in executive leadership, qualifications as a ColorCode Personality Science Trainer, and training in compassionate integrity training (CIT) facilitation.

Leading the conversation in Public Safety in Educational Environments is Kamilah Bywaters, a Rodman Scholars Fellow and a PhD candidate in early childhood, multilingual, and special education. She graduated with a bachelor's degree in addition to a Master of Education from UNLV and a Master of Divinity from Howard University. In the role of representation for Black Faith-Based Communities is Bishop Derek Rimson. In addition to serving as CEO and President of DEREK A. RIMSON MINISTRIES, he is Senior Pastor of KINGDOM DOMINION CATHEDRAL, INC. Bishop Derek Rimson has almost 25 years of experience as a pastor. Adrienne Feemster Cobb is the 3rd Vice President of NAACP Reno Branch Dr. Mary House is a successful businesswoman, family advocate, spiritual leader, motivator, and mentor, literally inspiring thousands of women and families, and countless strangers on a regular basis. Dr. House holds two Doctorate degrees (Doctor of Divinity and a Doctorate

of Humanity) and has received numerous community service awards. Jewel Eldridge is the executive president of the NV DBA (The Black Deaf Association). She has been the president for over three years. She advocates for black, deaf, and hard of hearing individuals. She is also the owner of the “Deaf People of Color”

Health & Wellness –Will Rucker

Observations:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified health disparities for Black Nevadans, particularly evident in elevated rates of COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths. Black communities in Nevada faced significantly higher rates of COVID-19 cases (7,027.4 per 100,000) ([Minority Health Report, 2023](#)). Underlying factors include pre-existing health conditions, limited health care access, socioeconomic challenges, vaccine hesitancy, and systemic inequities.
2. Black populations in Nevada exhibit higher death rates from chronic diseases, such as heart disease, with a rate of 332.9 per 100,000 in 2021 ([Minority Health Report, 2023](#)). Barriers to health care access further contribute to these disparities, with Black populations reporting difficulties affording doctor visits.

Underlying Risk Factors:

- Pre-existing Health Conditions:
 - Significant risk factors for severe COVID-19-related illness include age, heart disease, diabetes, and lung diseases (CDC, 2020).
 - Limited access to health care contributes to higher rates of COVID-19 among minority groups, especially Black people (Guinn, 2020).
- Socio-economic Challenges:
 - Limited health care facilities in Black neighborhoods.
 - Economic hardships exacerbate disparities in communities of color.
- Systemic Inequities in Health Care Access:
 - Disparities in health care access and delivery contribute to overall health inequalities.
- Reach out to community organizations focusing on the well-being of Black and Brown Deaf/Hard of Hearing individuals in Nevada for insights and connections.

Recommendations with Actionable Items:

Addressing these disparities requires concerted efforts:

- Equitable Vaccine Distribution:
 - Ensure vaccines are not only available but also accessible, with a focus on bringing vaccines to the most affected neighborhoods.
 - Utilize mobile vaccination clinics and partner with community centers for localized vaccine distribution.
- Culturally Competent Outreach and Education:
 - Engage in culturally competent outreach, collaborating closely with community leaders.
 - Use linguistically appropriate and relatable materials for education.
 - Initiate surveys and research studies to gather data within the black deaf and hard of hearing community.
 - Contact the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services for information on available resources.
 - Collaborative efforts between community organizations, health departments, and advocacy groups are essential to bridge these gaps and create a more inclusive and supportive environment for mental well-being within the community.
 - Foster open, honest conversations about the vaccine and the virus.
- Expanded Access to Health Care:
 - Work towards ensuring all Nevadans have health insurance.
 - Reduce geographical barriers to health care.
 - Address systemic issues affecting communities of color within the health care system.
- Financial Support:
 - Provide immediate relief through rent assistance, unemployment benefits, and food assistance.
 - Implement long-term strategies, including universal basic income, stable jobs, and affordable housing.

Expanded Actions:

- Expand Health Care Access and Improve Socio-economic Conditions:
 - Advocate for policies supporting health care and addressing socio-economic disparities through executive political will.
 - Collaborate with the Nevada Office of Minority Health and Equity to identify specific health care access challenges.

- Addressing mental health needs, particularly within the Deaf and Hard of Hearing community, is an additional trend that requires attention.
- Culturally Sensitive Interventions and Education on Health Maintenance:
 - Develop and implement programs focusing on culturally sensitive health interventions and education.
- Develop Economic Strategies Supporting Job Creation and Financial Literacy:
 - Collaborate with organizations to create economic strategies that focus on job creation and financial literacy.

Related Resources:

- American Psychological Association Services, Inc. (2020). Research roundup: How COVID-19 impacts African Americans. <https://www.apaservices.org/practice/ce/expert/covid-19-african-americans>
- American Public Health Association. (2020). Structural Racism is a Public Health Crisis: Impact on the Black Community. <https://www.apha.org/policies-and-advocacy/public-health%20policy-statements/policy-database/2021/01/13/structural-racism-is-a-public-health-crisis>
- Banks A. (2022). Black Adolescent Experiences with COVID-19 and Mental Health Services Utilization. *Journal of racial and ethnic health disparities*, 9(4), 1097–1105. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-021-01049-w>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Racism and Health | Minority Health. <https://www.cdc.gov/minorityhealth/racism-disparities/index.htm>
- Guinn Center. (2020). The Impact of COVID-19 on Communities of Color in Nevada. Retrieved from <https://guinncenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Guinn-Center-Impact-of-COVID-19-on-Communities-of-Color-in-Nevada.pdf>

Conclusion: Systemic health care disparities among Black Nevadans necessitate focused action for a more equitable health system. The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the urgency, with essential workers in Black communities experiencing heightened exposure.

Public Safety in Educational Environments - Kamilah Bywaters

Observations:

1. There is a concerning surge in mass shootings on school campuses, defined as incidents with three or more fatalities without a cooling-off period. These events exert significant psychological, physical, and social consequences on students, staff, and the broader community.
2. Higher education institutions like University of Nevada, Las Vegas with their diverse student body, provide valuable demographic data to understand the varied impact of these incidents across diverse groups through campus surveys.

Underlying Risk Factors:

- Individual Factors: Perpetrators often exhibit mental illness, challenging life circumstances, a history of bullying, and a 'warrior mentality.'
- Access to Firearms: The most reliable predictor of school shootings, emphasizing a critical area for intervention (Marshall & Clark, 2023).
- Institutional and Societal Factors: The role of institutions and societal norms in either mitigating or exacerbating these risks needs further exploration.

Recommendations with Actionable Items:

- Enhanced mental health services by collaborating with existing mental health support organizations in Nevada, such as the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public and Behavioral Health (DPBH), accessed throughout Nevada in search of local providers.
 - Collaborate with [NAMI Nevada](#) and [DPBH Behavioral Health](#) to enhance mental health services, including counseling and PTSD, depression, and anxiety support.
- Gun control measures through stricter gun control legislation might drastically lower the probability of school shootings.
 - Partner with Nevada-based advocacy groups to actively participate in campaigns and legislative efforts promoting stricter gun control laws.
- Bullying prevention programs by partnering with local education authorities in Nevada to implement comprehensive anti-bullying programs, addressing a key risk factor.
 - Collaborate with the Nevada Department of Education to integrate evidence-based anti-bullying programs into school curricula.

- Emergency preparedness with Nevada's education system to establish regular drills and clear protocols for managing such events, enhancing emergency preparedness.
 - Coordinate with the [Nevada Office of Emergency Management](#) to conduct drills and develop clear protocols for schools, ensuring effective emergency preparedness.
- Community engagement and education collaboration with community organizations and educational institutions in Nevada to raise awareness about potential violence signs and involve the community in prevention efforts.
 - Organize community forums in collaboration with local organizations and educational institutions to educate the public about recognizing signs of potential violence and fostering community involvement in prevention efforts.

Related Resources:

- Marshall, J. M., & Clark, B. L. (2023). A systematic literature review of educational leadership and U.S. school shootings: Establishing a research agenda. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 59(3), 594–632. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X231166335>
- Olzak, S. (2023). School shootings, protests, and the gun culture in the United States. *Social Forces*, 102(1), 116–138. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soad019>
- Brucato, G., Appelbaum, P. S., Hesson, H., Shea, E. A., Dishy, G., Lee, K., Pia, T., Syed, F., Villalobos, A., Wall, M. M., Lieberman, J. A., & Girgis, R. R. (2022). Psychotic symptoms in mass shootings v. mass murders not involving firearms: Findings from the Columbia mass murder database. *Psychological Medicine* 52(15), 3422-3430. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291721000076>
- Soni, A., & Tekin, E. (2020). How do mass shootings affect community wellbeing? *NBER Working Paper Series*. <https://doi.org/10.3386/w28122>

Conclusion: The increasing frequency and impact of school shootings demands a multi-faceted approach in Nevada. Addressing mental health issues, implementing effective gun control measures, and fostering a community-based approach to prevention and response are crucial. Understanding and mitigating underlying risk

factors are imperative for preventing future incidents and ensuring the safety and well-being of students and the broader community.

Public Policy, Law & Government - Adrienne Feemster Cobb

Observations:

1. Political determinants of the economic costs of wellness investigations on how political factors impact the economic dimensions of health and wellness for Black individuals in Nevada. Therefore, stressing the role of policies, laws, and government practices in shaping health outcomes, particularly for marginalized groups.
2. Public campaigns and strategies to promote health equity in Nevada. Focuses on strategies and campaigns in Nevada dedicated to promoting health equity. Advocates for precise, culturally competent approaches to dismantle systemic barriers, enhance healthcare access, and establish equitable health outcomes.

Underlying Risk Factors:

- Housing Insecurity in the Black Community.
- Challenges Linked to Employment, Income, Racism, Discrimination.
- Obstacles in Enhancing K-12 Education, Tackling Gun Violence, and Safeguarding Women's Rights.

Recommendations with Actionable Items:

- Strengthening Rural Healthcare Infrastructure because the average distance between acute care hospitals in rural Nevada and the next level of care or tertiary care hospital is 118 miles and the average distance to the nearest incorporated town is 46.3 miles.
 - Collaborate with the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services to secure increased funding for enhancing rural healthcare infrastructure.
- Establishing AI Ethics Policies, in the context of healthcare, this entails talking about data governance and the trade-off between protecting patient privacy and improving AI models that need more data (Schiff, 2022).
 - Partner with technology and healthcare stakeholders throughout Nevada to institute AI ethics policies addressing biases and ensuring inclusivity.

- **Prioritizing Climate Justice Initiatives.**
 - Advocate for the integration of climate justice initiatives, particularly in regions with heightened environmental risks, in collaboration with environmental organizations.
- **Enhancing Community Engagement in Policy Development.**
 - Establish forums and partnerships to amplify community engagement in policy development, ensuring inclusivity and diverse perspectives.
- **Increasing Funding for Healthcare Workforce Development.**
 - Collaborate with educational institutions and healthcare organizations to secure increased funding for healthcare workforce development, especially in underserved areas.

Related Resources:

- Schiff, D. (2022). Education for AI, not AI for Education: The Role of Education and Ethics in National AI Policy Strategies. *International Journal of Artificial Intelligence in Education*, 32(3), 527–563. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40593-021-00270-2>
- [The National Organization of State Offices of Rural Health \(NOSORH\)](#)
- [UNR Rural Populations](#)

Conclusion:

- **Uncovering Stark Realities:**
 - Illuminates significant health disparities and economic burdens faced by Black individuals and communities in Nevada.
- **Imperative for Targeted Interventions:**
 - Emphasizes the critical necessity for equitable interventions to address these disparities.
- **Political and Economic Intersectionality:**
 - Emphasizes the understanding of how political determinants intersect with the economic costs of wellness.
- **Need for Nuanced Policy Revision:**
 - Calls for nuanced approaches in policy revision to address these complex issues effectively.
- **Inclusive Institutional Practices:**

- Stresses the importance of adopting inclusive practices within institutions to support health equity.
- Empowering Communities:
 - Highlights the crucial role of community empowerment in fostering better health outcomes.
- Addressing Regional Variances:
 - Recognizes differences between Northern and Southern Nevada, urban and rural areas, suggesting a universal solution is not feasible.
- Region-Specific Strategies:
 - Recommends the development of strategies specific to the unique challenges of different regions in Nevada.
- Diagnostic and Catalyst Tool:
 - Intended to serve as a tool for comprehending current issues and catalyzing positive change.
- Advocacy for Health Equity:
 - Urges action from policymakers, stakeholders, and advocates to collaboratively work towards an environment where health equity becomes a reality for Black Nevadans.
- Future Guidance:
 - Designed to offer insights guiding future efforts to make wellness accessible to all, irrespective of racial or regional backgrounds, from the perspective of a Public Health Resource Officer.

Communication, Arts, and Culture in the Black Deaf and Hard of Hearing - Jewel Eldridge

Observations:

1. Accessibility Challenges:
 - Persistent concern about health inequities among Black Deaf and Hard of Hearing (DHH) individuals using American Sign Language (ASL).
 - Difficulty obtaining specific data on Black DHH signers due to general categorization in census data (Perrodin-Njoku, et. al, 2022).
 - Intersectional challenges, including racism and audism, affecting access to fair education, qualified interpreters in medical settings, and a lack of Black DHH physicians (Perrodin-Njoku, et. al, 2022).
2. Expression Limitation:

- Acculturative stress experienced by DHH individuals, especially with reliance on ASL interpreters.
 - Difficulties in finding qualified interpreters, issues of trustworthiness, and substantial preparation efforts (Aldalur, et. al, 2021).
3. Cultural Event Shortcomings:
- Acculturative stress in the Deaf community, involving pressures for proficiency in ASL and rejection based on signing talents.
 - Participants in both Deaf and Hearing communities reporting sentiments of exclusion, miscommunication, and misconceptions (Aldalur, et. al, 2021).

Underlying Risk Factors:

- Systematic lack of tailored resources and discussions.
- Insufficient professional training on the intersection of cultural nuances in the Black DHH community.
- Societal and cultural stigmas surrounding mental health, particularly in minority communities.

Recommendations with Actionable Items:

1. Advocacy for increased funding by lobbying for more resources specifically tailored to the needs of the Black DHH community in Nevada.
 - Establish a task force to engage with policymakers, healthcare organizations, and relevant stakeholders to advocate for increased funding and resource allocation.
 - Collaborate with National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) through their contact information at [NBDA Contact](#) to gather insights and support for the advocacy efforts.
2. Professional training and development which focuses on training more professionals in the nuanced intersection of cultural identity.
 - Collaborate with educational institutions and healthcare providers to develop and implement training programs that address the specific needs of the Black DHH community.
 - Engage with the National Association of the Deaf (NAD) through their contact information at [NAD Contact](#) for

- guidance and potential collaboration in professional training initiatives.
3. Inclusive platforms and representation that create and promote platforms for artistic expression that are inclusive of the Black DHH community.
 - Partner with local arts organizations and community centers to organize events and exhibitions featuring Black DHH artists.
 - Connect with the Black Deaf Center through their contact information at [Black Deaf Center Contact](#) to explore collaborations and support for inclusive artistic platforms.
 4. Enhanced Cultural Event Focus by integrating mental health discussions and resources into cultural events to promote awareness and reduce stigma.
 - Collaborate with mental health organizations to provide resources, workshops, and support during cultural events.
 - Investigate the BIPOC member section when available or contact the National Black Deaf Advocates (NBDA) for insights on race-based disparities in mental health within the Deaf community.

Related Resources:

- Aldalur, A., Pick, L. H., & Schooler, D. (2021). Navigating Deaf and Hearing Cultures: An Exploration of Deaf Acculturative Stress. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 26(3), 299–313. <https://doi.org/10.1093/deafed/enab014>
- Perrodin-Njoku, E., Corbett, C., Moges-Riedel, R., Simms, L., & Kushalnagar, P. (2022). Health disparities among Black deaf and hard of hearing Americans as compared to Black hearing Americans: A descriptive cross-sectional study. *Medicine (Baltimore)*, 101(2), E28464–e28464. <https://doi.org/10.1097/MD.00000000000028464>

Conclusion: The Black Deaf and Hard of Hearing community in Nevada face substantial challenges in accessibility, artistic expression, and cultural events. To address these challenges, the following recommendations with enhanced actionable items are proposed through advocacy for increased funding, inclusive platforms and representation and a focus on enhancing cultural events.

Environmental Challenges in Vulnerable Communities – Dr. Mary House

Observations:

1. Disproportionate impact on environmental justice communities within vulnerable groups, including children, low-income communities, and Black communities, face heightened health risks due to pollution.
2. Higher pollution exposure within communities in Nevada bears a heavier burden of outdoor and indoor air pollution, resulting in increased health issues such as asthma.
3. Inadequate housing conditions and poor housing conditions contribute to elevated pollution levels and health risks in areas across Nevada.

Underlying Risk Factors:

- Historical and systemic inequalities in housing, industrial zoning, and resource allocation.
- Higher susceptibility to health issues; due to pre-existing conditions and inadequate living environments
- Barriers to accessing resources limited access to health and safety resources and programs in Nevada calls for strategic interventions.

Recommendations with Actionable Items:

- Enhanced Air Pollution Regulation:
 - Implement stricter regulations on air pollution sources, particularly focusing on residential and commercial buildings.
 - Collaborate with state regulatory bodies to advocate for and enforce enhanced air pollution regulations.
- Equity-Focused Solutions:
 - Develop and enforce solutions that prioritize environmental justice communities in addressing heat vulnerability.
 - Collaborate with community leaders to create and implement programs and policies specifically tailored to address the unique needs of vulnerable communities.
- Infrastructure and Housing Improvements:
 - Invest in upgrading housing conditions and infrastructure in vulnerable areas.
 - Advocate for increased state funding and federal assistance programs to support infrastructure and housing improvements,

as well as make known already available resources through [Nevada Housing Division](#).

Related Resources:

- Reports and studies from:
 - Green and Healthy Homes Initiative
 - RMI (Rocky Mountain Institute)
 - WE ACT for Environmental Justice
- Federal programs:
 - Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP)
 - Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP)

Conclusion: The report emphasizes the urgent need for targeted efforts to mitigate environmental issues in vulnerable communities- addressing systemic disparities and prioritizing equitable solutions is crucial for improving the overall health and well-being of these populations.

Black Faith-Based Communities – Bishop Derek A. Rimson, Religious Advisor

Observations:

1. Interreligious dialogue can guide responses to societal disparities, emphasizing ethical behavior and shared justice principles (Miles-Tribble, 2020).
2. Black faith-based organizations provide cultural and spiritual reinforcement through gospel singers, praise dancers, and motivational sermons addressing real-time cultural issues and self-improvement.
3. Sixty percent of Black Americans attend Black congregations, influencing elected leaders to adopt laws improving Black lives. However, racial justice activities may pose challenges with diverse congregations (Brown, et.al, 2023).

Underlying Risk Factors:

- Economic Constraints: Limited resources hinder organizations' ability to maintain diverse services.

- Theological and Practical Questions: Leaders face challenges in responding to community-wide problems, prompting theological and practical considerations about faith's role in public justice initiatives (Miles-Tribble, 2020).
- Comparative Lack of Resources: Black faith-based organizations often have fewer resources compared to White counterparts.

Recommendations with Actionable Items:

- Create and conduct a financial plan to increase the variety of funding sources.
 - Explore grant opportunities through the Nevada Grant Office and seek partnerships with local businesses and philanthropic organizations.
- Boost Involvement with Future Generations.
 - Form a task group for youth involvement to collaborate with local educational institutions and youth organizations for mentorship programs and events.
- Lobby for policies ensuring equitable resource distribution among faith-based organizations, promoting fair resource distribution and acknowledgment.
 - Advocate for laws that guarantee religious institutions of equal resource distribution by engaging with Nevada legislators and policymakers, leveraging existing advocacy networks such as NOMHE.

Related Resources:

- Brown, R. K., Brown, R. E., & Wyatt, R. (2023). Race, Religion, and Black Lives Matter: Assessing the Association between Sermon Content and Racial Justice Attitudes and Behaviors. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 62(4), 729–748. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12844>
- Miles-Tribble, V. (2020). Change agent teaching for interreligious collaboration in Black Lives Matter times. *Teaching Theology & Religion*, 23(3), 140–150. <https://doi.org/10.1111/teth.12556>
- [Faith and Health Coalition Annual Reports](#)
- [Pew Research Center - Religious Landscape Study - Nevada](#)

Conclusion:

The synthesis underscores the potential for positive development through comprehensive services, cultural and spiritual reinforcement, and the crucial role played by Black faith-based groups in communities. Despite underlying obstacles, including financial limitations and complex religious issues, transformative education is needed to enable leaders to bridge societal gaps. Recommendations highlight the need for sustainable financial solutions, increased interaction with younger generations, and advocacy for equitable resource allocation to address the relative scarcity of resources. Implementing these recommendations can empower Black faith-based groups to make a substantial contribution to justice and societal well-being.

Acknowledgement:

The BLAC Committee would like to thank the below BLAC membership for their contribution:

Dr Samuel Hickson (Chair)

Will Rucker:

Health and Wellness

Kamilah Bywaters:

Youth Education and Attainment

Adrienne Feemster Cobb:

Public Policy, Law, and Government

Jewel Eldridge:

Communications, Art, and Culture

Dr Mary House:

Environmental Challenges in Vulnerable Communities

Bishop Derek Rimson:

Black Faith-Based Communities