







the part of practitioners, as research shows that implicit bias<sup>7</sup> plays a role in physician diagnostic and treatment decisions that can contribute to health disparities.

With all that in mind, it's critical to leverage existing avenues to both reach black men with health information and help link them to resources that connect them to the health care system. This paper zeroes in on one potential avenue — preconception and pregnancy-related care — to help underserved black men find and secure a medical home of their own.

This kind of strategy could involve health care providers, in both clinical and community settings, to work with women and their partners to uncover and address barriers to their family's health, while delivering patient-centered care within a framework that expressly acknowledges the interconnected, intergenerational nature of health disparities. This approach may be realized using evidence-based, low-cost interventions known to have positive spillover effects for improved family and community health. Furthermore, this approach is a practice in quality improvement and value-based care — two of the big priorities now driving innovation in health care services and delivery.

## II. DISPARITIES AMONG BLACK MEN IN AMERICA

*“Among the most overlooked populations who experience the poorest health outcomes and face the biggest barriers to care are men of color.” — David Satcher, MD, PhD, former U.S. Surgeon General*

Black men in America, and black Americans in general, experience striking disparities in both health and the determinants shaping health:

- As of 2015, black men's life expectancy at birth<sup>8</sup> was 72.2 years, more than four years shorter than white men.
- Black men are 30 percent<sup>9</sup> more likely to die from heart disease and 60 percent<sup>10</sup> more likely to die from stroke than white men.



### III. LEVERAGING PRENATAL CARE SETTINGS AS AVENUES FOR IMPROVING BLACK MEN'S HEALTH

*“Men’s health is a vital but neglected component of community health. A tetrad approach is necessary to optimize public health outcomes, including children’s health, women’s health, men’s health, and minority health as coequal partners. Addressing the health needs of males would very likely lead to overall improved health outcomes for communities and nations.” — Jean Bonhomme, MD, MPH, founder, National Black Men’s Health Network*

Black men’s health is connected to the health of families and children and can play a role in reducing racial disparities in pregnancy outcomes and infant mortality. Thus, using innovative, clinical-based and community-based interventions that actively engage black men during their and their partners’ preconception, prenatal and postnatal care would not only help address disparities affecting black men, but ideally result in numerous co-benefits for women and children.

Already, the Commission on Paternal Involvement in Pregnancy Outcomes<sup>22</sup> — a transdisciplinary working group of researchers, clinicians and public health professionals — has issued a report calling for increasing the involvement of men and expectant fathers in family planning, preconception and reproductive health as a way to reduce disparities in pregnancy outcomes. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists also recommends<sup>23</sup> that partners attend prenatal care appointments as a means of showing health-positive support for their pregnant partners.

The commission’s report acknowledges that while there is substantial research into the influence of fathers on child health development, there is much less on the



partnering with CHWs as a promising strategy to advance health equity and increase cultural competency within health care systems.

- **Become a source of men’s health information:** Knowing that men may be more open to health messaging during their partners’ pregnancies, women’s health, prenatal and postpartum care settings can also become sources of men’s health information. Among the wealth of brochures and tip sheets given to pregnant patients and new mothers, practitioners could also offer health tips for expectant and new fathers. That information can range from standard information on the importance of preventive men’s health screenings, regular physical activity, and healthy diets to more personalized information based on patient-provider conversations, such as information on tobacco cessation resources and behavioral health supports. Providers of clinical and community-based care for women can become active and vocal participants in Men’s Health Month ([menshealthmonth.org](http://menshealthmonth.org)) every June — an opportunity to illustrate the interdependent nature of family health.
- **Facilitate access to health insurance:** The research is clear<sup>29</sup> — having health insurance protects people’s physical, mental and financial health. Furthermore, research shows<sup>30</sup> that the access to insurance through the Affordable Care Act has significantly reduced racial and ethnic disparities in health care access. Gaining insurance coverage is also a first step in securing a patient-centered medical home, which research shows<sup>31</sup> is a promising method for improving outcomes and lowering costs. Providers of prenatal and postpartum care can partner with insurance and marketplace navigators to organize, host and promote insurance enrollment via the private marketplace and Medicaid. Such efforts could also be successful at reaching male partners, who face a greater risk<sup>32</sup> of being uninsured than the national average. Furthermore, insurance enrollment events can include information on public programs and community resources that impact the social determinants of health, such as food assistance and job training. These kinds of events not only have a direct impact on patients and their partners, they can also position practitioners as a trusted source of community information and a genuine partner in improving community health.
- **Embed men’s health in home-visiting programs and clinical public health programs:** Public health maternal and child health home-visiting programs have a unique opportunity to reach at-risk black men where they’re at. The federal Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting Program already has a successful track record, requiring grantees to show improvement across four of six benchmarks: maternal and newborn health; child injuries, abuse and neglect; school readiness; crime or domestic violence; family economic self-



sufficiency; and coordination and referral to other community resources. While many such home-visiting efforts certainly engage expectant and new fathers, a more formalized programmatic recognition of the role of men's health in family/child health could help drive momentum toward closing black men's health disparities.

## IV. CONCLUSION

*“People can dance all they want around this, but at the end of the day, if you're serious about being effective in eliminating health disparities, then you have to understand the root causes of health disparities. The root causes of health disparities are power differentials that are rooted in present and past practices, as well as the legacy of those past practices.” — Anthony Iton, MD, JD, MPH, Senior Vice President of Healthy Communities, The California Endowment*

Eliminating health disparities among black men will require long-term, collaborative and community-driven efforts. It is incumbent on both medical and public health practitioners to identify and leverage existing openings for reaching men, engage them in discussions about their own health, and ultimately connect them with timely access to medical care and preventive services. The transition to fatherhood may be an optimal time for reaching men as their partners will likely have multiple interactions with a health care professional.

Innovative, clinical-based and community-based interventions designed to improve preconception and pregnancy-related care could be a link to assist in closing health disparities among black men. With health equity always in frame, we should explore all avenues for reaching black men and widening the welcome mat into the health care system. Ultimately, understanding that men's health is family health will help us identify pivotal life-course factors and trajectories among boys of color as they grow into adulthood and fatherhood.

## References

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