

INSTITUTE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF MINORITY HEALTH

# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

Volume 5 Number 14 - SPRING 2025

Black Men's Health Equity Conference

## Prevention, Power, and Progress: The Future of Black Men's Health



### In This Issue:

- Black Men's Health Equity Conference Updates
- Black Maternal Health Week
- Health Advocacy Efforts

Conference Keynote Speaker:  
Journalist Roland Martin

# Safeguarding the Public's Health Today, Tomorrow and in the Future

Public health is important for improving the health and well-being of communities. It focuses on preventing diseases and promoting health through community-based efforts and policy interventions. It aims to improve health outcomes for everyone by addressing the social, environmental, and economic factors that influence health. It has also been proven that public health initiatives, like vaccinations and clean water policies, have significantly increased life expectancy and improved overall health.



**Sandra C. Melvin,**  
DrPH, MPH,  
Chief Executive Officer

Public health programs and interventions address socioeconomic factors that impact health, such as poverty, discrimination, and lack of access to healthy food. Public health professionals work to protect communities from outbreaks by monitoring for disease outbreaks, providing public information and education, and coordinating responses to emergencies. Furthermore, integrating public health approaches in health care systems can strengthen health care infrastructure by ensuring access to services and promoting preventative care. This can lead to improved quality of life for communities and reduced healthcare costs. Public health research is important to better understand health issues and develop new interventions to address the factors that promote or prevent good health and wellbeing.

The current administration's approach to health equity has been characterized by a significant shift away from initiatives and policies aimed at reducing health disparities and promoting equitable access to healthcare. The administration has issued executive orders that have led to the dismantling of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and initiatives across federal agencies, including those focused on health. These executive orders will have lasting implications on the health and well-being of historically disadvantaged, marginalized, and underserved communities in this country. For example, public health experts and advocates have indicated that the dismantling of health equity initiatives could worsen existing disparities. Changes to the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid, coupled with the elimination of outreach and enrollment programs, could reduce access to affordable healthcare for millions of Americans. Furthermore, the rollback of nondiscrimination regulations could undermine protections for LGBTQ+ individuals and other marginalized groups. Finally, cuts to public health funding could weaken the nation's ability to respond to public health crises and address health disparities.

As public health professionals, our role in protecting and promoting the public's health is more important than ever. Our most pressing challenges are to ensure adequate funding for public health programs, create partnerships with community stakeholders to maximize available resources, and to continue to advocate for policies that promote healthier communities.

Sandra Carr Melvin, DrPH, MPH, MLS

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sandra C. Melvin".

CEO/Founding President  
Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health



# Award-Winning Journalist Roland Martin to Headline Third Annual Black Men's Health Equity Conference

Nationally acclaimed journalist and political commentator Roland Martin is the keynote speaker for the third annual Black Men's Health Equity Conference. The conference will be held at 9 a.m., Saturday, August 23, 2025, in the Bennie G. Thompson Academic & Civil Rights Research Center at Tougaloo College, Tougaloo, MS.

During his keynote address, Martin will focus on the future of Black men's health and will address the urgent need for health systems, policymakers, and communities to work collaboratively in addressing disparities.

The opportunity for Mississippi men to hear directly from Roland Martin about owning their health is a privilege. This conference is not just a conversation—it's a movement toward saving lives.

The one-day event will include panel discussions on mental health, chronic disease prevention, financial health, and environmental justice. Previous conferences have featured NAACP-MS Executive Director Charles Taylor, Dr. Justin Turner, Attorney Edward Blackmon, and Exonerated Five member Dr. Yusef Salaam. The 2025 conference will continue the legacy of providing a platform for health awareness, empowerment, and change. The deadline to register for the conference is July 31, 2025. Sponsorship, vendor, and advertising opportunities are still available. For more information or to register, visit [www.minority-institute.org](http://www.minority-institute.org).



The poster is for the Black Men's Health Equity Conference. It features a portrait of Roland Martin, an award-winning journalist, smiling. The text includes the date 'Aug 23 2025', the title 'Prevention, Power, and Progress: The Future of Black Men's Health', and the venue 'Bennie G. Thompson Academic & Civil Rights Research Center' at Tougaloo College. A QR code is provided for registration, with the link 'bit.ly/futureofbmh' and a 'Registration Deadline: July 31, 2025'.

Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health

Black Men's Health Equity Conference

BLACK MEN'S HEALTH Equity Council

**Aug 23 2025**

Featuring award-winning journalist Roland Martin

**Prevention, Power, and Progress:**  
The Future of Black Men's Health

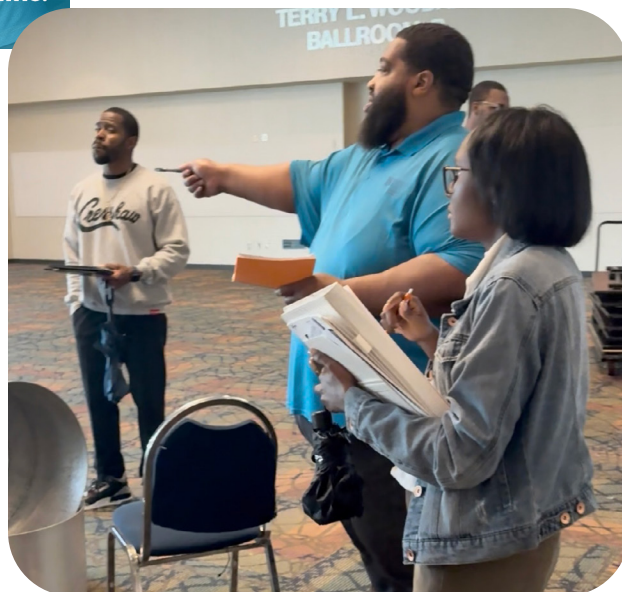
**NEW VENUE**  
**Bennie G. Thompson Academic & Civil Rights Research Center**  
Tougaloo College  
500 W County Line Rd  
Tougaloo, MS 39174

Scan here to Register

[bit.ly/futureofbmh](http://bit.ly/futureofbmh)

**Registration Deadline:**  
**July 31, 2025**

*Institute staff members recently conducted a walk-through at Jackson State University in preparation for the upcoming Black Men's Health Equity Conference. Akita Campbell and Warren Jones listen as JSU staff discusses facility logistics.*



# January 2025

## Institute Staff Helps *Clear The Smoke* About Dangers of Tobacco

The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health, *Clear The Smoke* social media campaign launched in 2024. The campaign is designed to educate and empower the community regarding the harmful impact of tobacco use. Institute staff will align this campaign with health awareness months throughout the year and distribute resources/information that supports individuals who want to quit smoking.

## Health Resources Distributed Via Community Outreach

The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health began the new year focused on improving the health of Black men through direct outreach and education. From feeding the unhoused to providing health screenings in neighborhood barbershops, the Institute meets men where they are—both physically and emotionally. On January 16, 2025, the Institute partnered with the Billy Brumfield House to serve meals to 39 unhoused men. In addition to a warm meal, participants received information on health resources and support services designed to promote their overall well-being.

Later in the month, the Institute continued its efforts in the Mississippi Delta with its signature

***Barbershop Series***. On January 31, 2025, Precision Cuts Barbershop in Cleveland, MS, opened its doors to host the event. Sixteen men received free blood pressure screenings and educational materials on tobacco cessation. ***The Barbershop Series*** aims to deliver vital health information in familiar and trusted community spaces. By offering services in barbershops—settings that hold cultural and social significance for Black men—the initiative fosters open dialogue and encourages preventive care in a relaxed, non-intimidating environment.

As the year continues, the Institute plans to expand the ***Barbershop Series*** and other outreach efforts in order to reduce health disparities and build stronger, healthier communities.



# *February 2025*

## **A Clean Temple Equals Strong Lungs: Church Stands Against Vaping and Tobacco**

With heart disease continuing to disproportionately affect Black men, Beulah Grove Missionary Baptist Church in Leland, MS, partnered with the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health to promote heart health and tobacco prevention through a faith-based lens. On February 28, 2025, the congregation hosted the Men's Heart Health: Tobacco and Vaping Webinar. The educational session focused on the harmful impact of smoking and vaping drew eleven participants who received critical information on how tobacco contributes to heart disease and strategies for quitting.

Rooted in the belief that the body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, the webinar emphasized both physical and spiritual wellness. Faith leaders and health educators joined forces to deliver a message of empowerment, encouraged men to protect their hearts and make healthier lifestyle choices. By combining health education with faith-based motivation, the event reflected a growing movement in the Mississippi Delta to address health disparities through trusted community institutions like the Black church.

## **Institute and AKA Empower Local Parents**

Information, resources, and support were on the menu during a recent Lunch and Learn held at the Jackson Medical Mall for expecting and new parents. On February 28, 2025, the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.®, Rho Lambda Omega Chapter hosted an educational session to equip over twenty-five families with the tools needed to give their babies a healthy start.

The moms and dads in attendance gained critical knowledge to help them successfully navigate

early parenthood via interactive sessions on infant CPR, maternal mental health, breastfeeding, and self-care. Vendors provided free diapers, feminine hygiene products, and a range of community resources.

Ensuring parents have access to the information and resources necessary to support the well-being of their child implements the Institute's mission to help reduce health disparities in Mississippi...one community at a time.

## **Community Organizations Provide Support to Area Unhoused Residents**

The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health, in partnership with Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.®, Rho Lambda Omega Chapter; Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc., Jackson Alumni Chapter; and H.E.A.L. Mississippi, provided care and essential support to the unhoused clients of the Opportunity Center Day Shelter in Jackson, MS.

On Saturday, February 15, 2025, volunteers hosted a morning of wellness. Opportunity Center clients were served a hot/hearty brunch and received non-perishable food items, hygiene products, and free haircuts.

In addition to these services, attendees were given access to vital health and wellness resources. The Institute is dedicated to addressing health disparities and improving the well-being of marginalized communities by providing access to necessities and health resources. Other event supporters included the Jackson Heart Study, Western Hinds County Young Professionals, Inc., and the DJ Rafe Experience.





# The Institute Works to Advance Health Policy at the State Capitol

During the recent Mississippi Legislative Session, the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health participated in various advocacy days at the Capitol. Staff was present to advocate and raise awareness regarding maternal health and the access to care in MS.

Institute CEO/Founding President Dr. Sandra Melvin was a luncheon speaker at the inaugural Black Maternal Health Day at the Mississippi Capitol on February 12, 2025. During her informative speech, Dr. Melvin spoke about the importance of advocacy on behalf of mothers and children. She shared data regarding maternal health and maternity health

deserts in Mississippi. Luncheon attendees were urged to reach out to their legislators to advocate for bills concerning the diaper tax and period tax, which were under consideration in the Mississippi House and Senate.

During the NAACP-MS Advocacy Day, the focus was health equity issues that directly impact Black communities. This included access to quality healthcare via the expansion of Medicaid. Standing alongside community partners, stakeholders and policymakers helps fulfill the mission of the Institute....to reduce health disparities in Mississippi one community at a time.



Men's Health Program Manager Markyel Pittman was a speaker at the NAACP-MS Advocacy Day in February. During the Inaugural Black Maternal Health Advocacy Day, Dr. Melvin greets Chelsea Presley, Executive Director, Diaper Bank of the Delta. Program Manager Latasha Rice and Dr. Melvin pose after the luncheon.

# March 2025

## Clearing the Air: Advancing Tobacco Cessation and Lung Health in Mississippi

The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health hosted a virtual advocacy educational training session at 11 a.m., March 19, 2025. The session focused on the ***State of Tobacco Cessation and Lung Cancer Screening in Mississippi***. Twenty participants logged into the session.

Led by Jonathan Hontzas, DNP, NP-C, Director of the ACT Center and Lung Cancer and Research

Institute, the training provided insights into the latest advancements in tobacco cessation, early detection of lung cancer, and strategies to improve health outcomes across Mississippi. The training equipped community stakeholders with essential knowledge and tools to support individuals in their pursuit of better health and well-being.

## Mississippi Delta Residents Attend Payday Lending Town Hall Meetings

During the Winter of 2025, Humphreys and Coahoma County residents participated in important conversations regarding the impact of payday lending. The Financial Literacy and Payday Lending Town Hall Meetings were sponsored by Higher Purpose Company, the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health, and the Epps Institute. These sessions offered both practical guidance and resources that promote financial resilience.

The town hall meetings aimed to address the financial challenges faced by many families in rural and economically vulnerable communities. Presenters unpacked key topics such as budgeting, saving, credit management, and the dangers of high-interest payday loans. The discussion also highlighted the long-term effects of predatory lending practices and the need for community-driven alternatives. For many, the meeting served as an eye-opener to just how deeply payday lending practices are woven into the local economy, and the lasting damage they can cause.



During the town hall sessions, Helen Way explains the negative impact of payday loans on the lives of borrowers.

The Institute for Advancement of Minority Health  
presents its

### Financial Literacy and Payday Lending Community Town Hall

**Thursday  
March 13, 2025  
5pm**  
**Anguilla Town Hall**  
22 Rolling Fork Rd  
Anguilla, MS

A man and a woman are sitting on a couch, looking at a laptop screen. The man is pointing at the screen while the woman looks on. They appear to be discussing something important.

Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health **HIGHER PURPOSE** **BLACK MEN'S HEALTH** **EPPS INSTITUTE**

Free and open to the public  
Refreshments will be served

For more information contact Markyel Pittman at [mpittman@advancingminorityhealth.org](mailto:mpittman@advancingminorityhealth.org)



*April 2025*

## **Institute Uses Virtual Platforms and the Pavement to Raise Awareness During Black Maternal Health Week**

During Black Maternal Health Week (April 11-17), the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health leveraged its social media platforms to highlight the disparities Black women experience during pregnancy and childbirth. Through the dissemination of educational messages, the campaign raised awareness, promoted health equity, and equipped community members with the knowledge and resources needed to advocate for meaningful change.

On April 12, 2025, Latasha Rice, the Institute's Maternal and Child Health Program Manager, participated in the Miles for Mamas 5K. Held in

honor of Black mothers who continue to fight for quality care and those whose lives were cut short due to preventable complications, the 5K served as both a call to action and a celebration of resilience.

"Black Maternal Health Week reminds us that every step we take—whether in policy, programming, or a 5K—is part of a larger journey toward justice," said Rice. "This was my first 5K. I walked those 3.1 miles because every Black mother deserves to be seen, heard, and supported."

The Institute was a race sponsor and a vendor during the post race resource fair.



Latasha Rice, Maternal and Child Health Program Manager, represented the Institute during the Miles for Mamas 5K Run/Walk in April.



# Institute Supports Self-Care Event during Stress Awareness Month

Leadership from the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health took center stage at **A Pretty Girls Day Out**. Hosted by Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.®, Rho Lambda Omega chapter, this self-care and empowerment event was designed to help Black women in the Metro Area reduce and eliminate stress. Held on April 5, 2025, during Stress Awareness Month, the event featured a panel discussion addressing stress, wellness, and the importance of prioritizing mental and physical health.

Dr. Talya Straughter, an Institute board member and Latasha Rice, Maternal and Child Health Program Manager, served as panelists. Drawing from their personal and professional experiences, both spoke

candidly about the unique stressors Black women face and the importance of through self-care.

In addition to the panel, **A Pretty Girl's Day Out** included chair yoga, self-care vendors and free chair massages. The Institute provided health resources and assisted in the curation of a Pretty Stress Free playlist which was distributed to all attendees. Support for **A Pretty Girl's Day Out** reflects the Institute's commitment to advancing community-based health education and while addressing the social determinants that impact women's health and well-being.



Attendees enjoy a moment of medication following chair yoga. Minority vendors sold self-care products. Dr. Talya Straughter and Latasha Rice served provided valuable information as panelists.

# May 2025

## MCH Program receives Donation during Period Poverty Awareness Week

In observance of Period Poverty Awareness Week, the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health's Maternal and Child Health Program received a generous donation of more than 100 packages of feminine hygiene products from Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated®, Rho Lambda Omega Chapter.

Period Poverty Awareness Week, observed May 12–18, 2025, is dedicated to raising awareness about the barriers that many women and girls face in accessing essential menstrual products. The chapter's contribution is part of a broader initiative to address menstrual inequity and improve health outcomes for underserved communities. This donation will make a difference in the lives of

women and girls who too often go without the basic products necessary to maintain their health and dignity. The items will be distributed through the Institute's Baby Depot and RMOMS projects. These programs provide menstrual hygiene supplies to women throughout Central Mississippi and the Mississippi Delta. The Institute is grateful for the continued partnership and commitment of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated®, Rho Lambda Omega Chapter to serve the community.

For more information about the Institute's programs or to request menstrual hygiene products, please visit [www.minority-institute.org](http://www.minority-institute.org).



Alpha Kappa Alpha member Jennie Hall packs the items donated to the Maternal and Child Health Program.



Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority members Tonya Spells Jones, Jennie Hall, Dawn Magee (Chapter President), and Jameshia Ballard assisted in the collection and donation of items for the Maternal and Child Health Program. The items were received by Program Manager Latasha Rice (fourth from left).



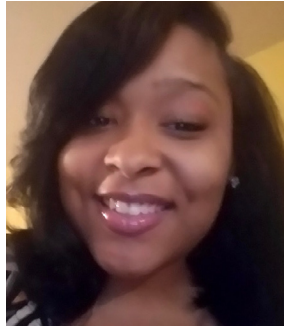
# Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health Staff



**Sandra C. Melvin,**  
DrPH, MPH,  
Chief Executive Officer



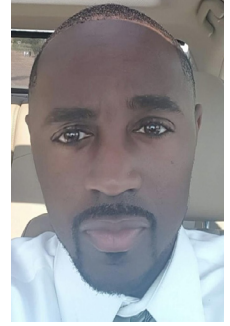
**Akita Campbell**  
Office Manager/  
Executive Assistant



**Chasitie Webster**  
Human Resource Director



**Noah Brittain**  
Vice President of Finance  
and Accounting



**Ra'Shad Jones**  
Accounts Payable  
Specialist



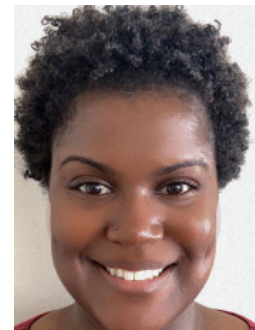
**Mya Hayes**  
Grant Management Specialist



**Marilyn Reed**  
Director of Communications



**Frederick Smith**  
Webmaster/Social Media  
Manager



**Krystina Hart, MPH**  
Program Manager



**LaTasha Rice**  
Program Manager



**Shelethia Whisenton**  
Program Manager



**Markyel Pittman**  
Program Manager



**Kendria Barnes,**  
Epidemiologist II



**Warren Jones, MPH**  
Epidemiologist



**Miracle Vance**  
Program Specialist



**D'Anah Evans**  
Program Specialist



**Peggie Jones**  
Community Outreach Specialist

