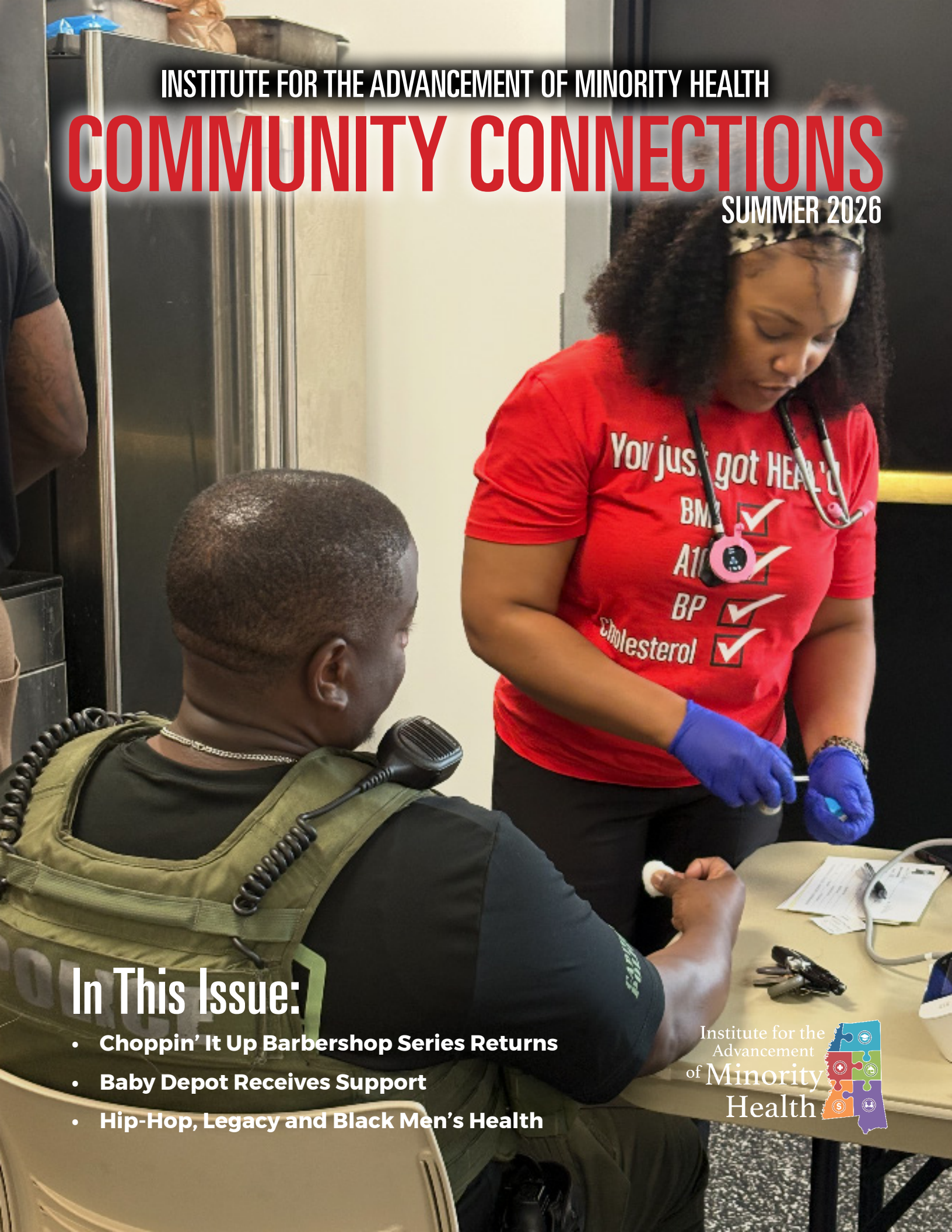


INSTITUTE FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF MINORITY HEALTH

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

SUMMER 2026



In This Issue:

- Choppin' It Up Barbershop Series Returns
- Baby Depot Receives Support
- Hip-Hop, Legacy and Black Men's Health

Institute for the
Advancement
of Minority
Health



Message from the CEO: Men's Health Requires Action

Too many men wait until symptoms appear before getting tested. That approach is costing lives. Chronic disease testing and cancer screening are not optional wellness activities. They are essential tools for preventing disease, detecting it early, and giving men more time with their families, in their workplaces and in their communities.

In Mississippi, the stakes are especially high. Prostate cancer remains a serious threat. According to the National Cancer Institute, Mississippi's prostate cancer incidence rate is 139.0 per 100,000 men, higher than the U.S. rate of 116.4, and the prostate cancer death rate is 24.8 per 100,000, compared with 19.2 nationally. Colorectal cancer also continues to place a heavy burden on our state. Mississippi's colorectal cancer incidence rate is 46.0 per 100,000, compared with 36.7 nationally, and the death rate is 17.7 per 100,000, compared with 12.9 nationally.

These numbers represent fathers, brothers, cousins, husbands, sons, coworkers, pastors, coaches, and neighbors. They also remind us that early detection matters. Prostate cancer screening conversations, colorectal cancer screening, blood pressure checks, cholesterol testing, A1C testing, and routine primary care visits can identify risk before a crisis occurs.

Heart disease and diabetes must be part of this conversation. According to the Mississippi State Department of Health's Annual Prevalence Report (2023), 11.3% of men in Mississippi report having been told they have cardiovascular disease, including heart attack, angina, coronary heart disease, or stroke. Diabetes is also highly prevalent among men in Mississippi. About 18.0% of Mississippi men report having been told they have diabetes. Nationally, heart disease remains the leading cause of death for men, and many men may have no symptoms before a serious cardiac event.

We have a responsibility to help change the culture around men's health. Testing is not a sign of weakness. It is an act of leadership, discipline, and prevention. Men should know their numbers, understand their risks, and talk with a trusted health care provider about the screenings appropriate for their age, family history, and personal health profile.

I am asking every man in our organization and every family member we serve to take one concrete step: schedule the appointment, complete the recommended screening, ask the question, and follow through. Early detection saves lives, but only when we make testing a priority.

Men's health cannot wait until something feels wrong. Prevention starts with action.

Sandra Carr Melvin, DrPH, MPH, MLS



CEO/Founding President
Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health



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

Barbershop and Council Meetings Re-emerge to Address Health Disparities

The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health is once again bringing together familiar voices, trusted spaces, and proven leadership to confront growing health inequities affecting Black men and underserved communities throughout the state. The Barbershop Series and Black Men's Health Equity Council are back to meet the demand as rising health disparities continue to plague Black communities across Mississippi.

Increasing rates of chronic disease, mental health challenges, tobacco-related illnesses, and barriers to healthcare access have highlighted the urgent need for community-centered conversations and solutions. In response, the Institute will host four Barbershop Series activities designed to encourage open dialogue about preventive care, mental health, healthy lifestyles, chronic disease prevention, and overall community well-being.

Held in familiar and trusted settings, the Barbershop Series will provide opportunities for participants to engage in honest discussions, receive valuable health information, and connect with supportive resources that can help improve health outcomes for individuals and families.

The Black Men's Health Equity Council will also continue its efforts to address the disparities impacting Black men across Mississippi. Through collaboration with community leaders, healthcare professionals, advocates, and residents, the council will work to increase awareness, strengthen partnerships, and identify community-driven strategies that promote health equity and long-term wellness.

The Institute plans to host 12 council meetings and 12 unhoused health and wellness events throughout the year to further expand outreach efforts and connect communities with education, support services, and wellness resources.

Through these initiatives, the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health remains committed to reducing health disparities, empowering communities, and improving the quality of life for underserved populations across Mississippi.



Observing Men's Health Month

The B-Side of Hip-Hop: Chronic Disease, Cancer, and the Cost of Silence

Our Hip Hop and R&B icons are dying. One by one, the Black men who created the sound, style, and soul of an entire generation are becoming ancestors before they are even eligible for Social Security. The hip-hop community is mourning another painful loss — legendary rapper Rob Base recently died at 59 following a private battle with cancer. Best known for the groundbreaking anthem “It Takes Two,” Rob Base helped bring hip-hop into the mainstream and created music that became the soundtrack of an entire era. His death is yet another reminder that cancer and chronic disease continue to disproportionately impact Black men and too often go undetected until it is too late.

Last October, fans mourned the loss of neo-soul legend D’Angelo, who died at 51 after battling pancreatic cancer. In recent years, the culture has also lost hip-hop executive and producer Irv Gotti (54) and rapper Biz Markie (57), both of whom suffered complications related to diabetes. Meanwhile, Fatman Scoop (53) and Magoo (50) died from cardiovascular-related illnesses. Together, these losses reflect a growing health crisis impacting Black men across the country.

A Health Crisis Hidden in Plain Sight

As social media timelines overflow with tributes celebrating their genius, a painful truth must reset our algorithms. Chronic diseases and unequal access to care can contribute to the shortening of Black men’s lives. Heart disease, diabetes, kidney failure, and cancer continue to take a devastating toll not only on beloved artists but also on our fathers, brothers, uncles, and friends. According to the Brookings Institution, the average life expectancy of a Black man in the United States is just 71 years as opposed to the 77 years for white men. The gap reflects deep disparities in access to health care, preventive services, and the social conditions that shape health outcomes. The National Journal of Medicine researched the link between medical mistrust and how often African American men go to the doctor for routine care. Many Black men delay or skip regular checkups, blood pressure tests, and cholesterol screenings because they don’t fully trust the healthcare system. Mistrust becomes even stronger when procedures are more invasive, such as prostate exams, cancer screenings, or HIV testing. Unfortunately, this lack of trust may lead to late diagnoses and missed chances to prevent or manage serious health problems.

A Community Response: The Tell Ten Challenge

Health disparities among minorities are nothing new, but the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health (IAMH) is working to upgrade health outcomes through its new initiative, the Tell Ten Challenge. The challenge is a byproduct of Roland Martin’s keynote address delivered during the 2025 Black Men’s Health Equity Conference. It is a call to action for Black men to take responsibility for their health and for each other’s well-being. It’s a simple, man-to-man movement that transforms concern into action.

Tell Ten Challenge Rules

1. **Select Ten Names.** Choose ten men in your circle — fathers, brothers, cousins, fraternity or Masonic brothers, and friends.
2. **Start the Conversation.** Text or call them and ask direct questions about their health. When was your last check-up? What’s your blood pressure? Do you know your A1C? Need a ride to the doctor?
3. **Take Action Together.** Share clinic information, go to appointments together, and follow through on screenings.
4. **Offer Support.** If you’re nervous, I’ll go with you.
5. **Follow Up.** Check back to be sure they made the appointment. Ask for the date and time. Hold them accountable. Stay on them until there are results.
6. **Share Your Success.** Take photos with your crew and post them using the hashtag #iamhtellten.

A Culture That Changed the World Can Help Save It

For more than fifty years, hip-hop has told the truth about the power, pain, and perseverance in the Black community. Now, it’s time for that same culture to fuel community health, wellness, and healing. In his classic song *Changes*, Tupac Shakur said, “You see, the old way wasn’t workin’. So, it’s on us to do what we gotta do to survive.” Tell Ten is an action plan. It moves participants from survival to transformation. If ten men commit to telling ten more, and those ten tell ten more, the future of Black men’s health can improve. To join The Tell Ten Challenge, visit minority-institute.org/tell-ten-challenge.

IAMH, H.E.A.L. Mississippi, and UMMC Unite to Advance Law Enforcement Health and Wellness

Approximately 30 local law enforcement officers received free health screenings and health education during the Serve Day Health Fair held June 12 at the Capitol Police Command Center in Jackson, MS.

Hosted by H.E.A.L. Mississippi, the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health, and the University of Mississippi Medical Center's MIND Center, the event brought critical health services directly to first responders while emphasizing the importance of preventive care and early detection.

H.E.A.L. Mississippi provided blood pressure and glucose screenings. These screenings revealed several elevated readings that highlighted the need for follow-up care. Some officers were surprised by their screening results. The findings highlighted the importance of routine health screenings and regular medical checkups.

The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health engaged participants through its men's health education exhibit and sparked conversations about chronic disease prevention and overall wellness. Representatives from UMMC's MIND Center shared information on Alzheimer's disease, brain health, and the early warning signs of cognitive decline. Organized by Chris Fields, executive director of H.E.A.L. Mississippi, Serve Day supported the health and wellness of all law enforcement officers.

January 2026 Starting the Year with Service

The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health proudly participated in the launch of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated's *Power of S.H.E. (Social, Health, and Economic Justice) Community Blueprint*, a national initiative focused on advancing maternal and infant health equity in communities across the country. The event was held on January 17, 2026, at the Jackson Medical Mall and brought together community leaders, advocates, healthcare professionals, and residents committed to improving outcomes for Black mothers and families.

The *Power of S.H.E. Community Blueprint* serves as a national framework designed to address the social, economic, and health-related factors contributing to poor maternal and infant health outcomes—particularly among Black women in Mississippi and throughout the South. Through education, advocacy, community partnerships, and resource coordination, the initiative aims to create sustainable solutions that support healthier pregnancies, safer births, and stronger families.



Latasha Rice shares resources and information during the Community Baby Shower sponsored by Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.® Rice poses with Dr. Stacie NC Grant, the 26th International President of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc.®

During the launch event, more than 23 individuals received support services, health information, and community resources focused on maternal wellness, infant care, and family support systems. Participants were connected with valuable tools and organizations working to reduce disparities in healthcare access and improve health outcomes within underserved communities.

IAMH's participation reflects the organization's continued commitment to advancing health equity and supporting collaborative efforts that empower women, strengthen families, and improve the quality of life in Mississippi communities. By partnering with organizations like Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated®, IAMH continues to help create spaces where education, advocacy, and action come together to drive meaningful change.

Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.®, Helps The Institute Support MS Families

During the 2026 Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health received over 5,000 infant essentials from Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated® Beta Delta Omega Chapter. This donation to the Institute's Baby Depot will help reduce diaper insecurity throughout Mississippi. Diaper insecurity is the lack of access to an adequate supply of clean diapers for infants and toddlers. It often forces families to choose between purchasing diapers and paying for necessities like rent or utilities.

The Institute commends Beta Delta Omega chapter for embodying the legacy of Dr. King's Poor People's Campaign, which called for access to healthcare, and economic justice. This donation of diapers, wipes and food is more than just supplies. This gift provides support for the state's youngest citizens while reducing financial stress for Medicaid-eligible families.



February 2026

Inaugural Community Resource Fair Connects Jackson Residents to Vital Services

Health services, voter education and critical resources were all under one roof Saturday as more than 50 residents attended the inaugural Community Resource Fair at College Hill Missionary Baptist Church.



The event was hosted by Rep. Grace Butler Washington in collaboration with Hinds County Election Commissioner Felicia McClinton, District 5, and the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health. Attendees spoke directly with representatives from organizations offering essential community resources. Twenty-nine participants received HIV screenings, and several individuals registered to vote during the event.

"Bringing services directly into neighborhoods helps remove barriers and ensures residents are aware of available increased support," Washington said.

She added that partnerships like this are key to strengthening communities and expanding access to care and information. Organizers plan to make the Community Resource Fair an annual event to continue supporting constituents and clients through access to services, education and community-based resources. The event was free and open to the public.

February Outreach Expands Community Impact

February outreach efforts continued to build momentum, with Institute programs reaching families across multiple counties through community events focused on education, resources and support.

In Washington County, 41 individuals were reached during a Community Health Fair in Greenville. Participants engaged with programs focused on chronic disease prevention, maternal health and overall wellness. The event provided an opportunity for residents to access information and services that support healthier lifestyles.

In Sharkey County, 23 families were supported at the Cary Christian Community Parent-Child Ministry Community Baby Shower. The event focused on equipping parents with essential items and education to support both maternal and infant health.

Outreach efforts continued in Washington County with the Healthy Hearts, Healthy Lives community wellness event, where 30 participants were engaged through RMOMS programming. Attendees received resources and information aimed at promoting heart health and overall well-being.



Black Maternal Health Day Focuses On Mothers' Needs

Black Maternal Health Day at the Capitol was on Feb. 24. Leaders gathered at the MS State Capitol to highlight the needs of mothers across Mississippi.

During the event, program representatives engaged with policymakers to elevate community concerns and support legislation aimed at improving maternal health outcomes. Key priorities included expanding the maternal health workforce, strengthening education and training pipelines and increasing fatherhood engagement.

Organizers said the day served as an opportunity to center the voices of Mississippi mothers.



State Representative Chris Bell engages in conversation regarding Black Maternal Health. Bell is the president of the IAMH Board of Directors.

EmpowerMoms Directory Connects Delta Mothers to Health Resources

For many families in the Mississippi Delta, finding prenatal care, breastfeeding support, nutrition assistance, and other essential services can mean navigating a complex maze of programs and providers. A new online resource aims to change that.

The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health (IAMH) and Delta Community Solutions has launched the EmpowerMoms MS Delta Resource Referral Directory. This new online tool is designed to connect mothers and families with critical health services, community programs, and family support resources across the MS Delta region.

Supported through funding from the Women's Foundation of Mississippi, the directory is an easy-to-use digital directory that compiles information in one place. The resource helps Delta parents, caregivers, healthcare providers, and community organizations quickly locate services related to prenatal care and family support programs.

"The EmpowerMOMS MS Delta Resource & Referral Directory was developed to strengthen the network of care supporting mothers and families across the Mississippi Delta," said Jacqueline Hawkins of Delta Community Solutions. "By connecting women to resources and community support, we are helping ensure brighter futures for families throughout our region."

The directory includes services and organizations serving families in the following counties: Bolivar, Coahoma DeSoto, Holmes, Humphreys, Issaquena, Leflore, Panola, Quitman, Sharkey, Sunflower County, Tallahatchie, Tate, Tunica, Washington and Yazoo.

Families in the Mississippi Delta should not have to navigate pregnancy, infant care, and early childhood without access to the resources they need. The EmpowerMoms directory is about removing barriers and making sure mothers can quickly access services that support healthy pregnancies, healthy babies, and stronger families. When we equip mothers with the right resources, we strengthen the entire community.

To secure the EmpowerMoms MS Delta Resource Referral Directory, visit www.minority-institute.org/empowermoms.

EmpowerMoms MS Delta
Resource Referral Directory
funded by the Women's Foundation of Mississippi

Serving the following counties:
Bolivar,
Coahoma,
Humphreys,
Leflore,
Issaquena,
Sharkey,
Sunflower,
Quitman, and
Washington

Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health

DELTA COMMUNITY SOLUTIONS, LLC

Developed by the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health with support from Delta Community Solutions.

The graphic features a smiling Black woman holding a baby. The background is a light teal color with a white border.

March 2026 Institute Supports Mississippi Mothers

Community Baby Showers held throughout March provided essential supplies and support to dozens of mothers across Mississippi. On March 26, the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health, in collaboration with the HIV Testing Team, hosted a community baby shower serving 12 mothers. Participants received breast pumps, diapers, postpartum care supplies and infant formula.



Magnolia Health hosted a baby shower on March 27 in Greenwood, MS. Nineteen mothers received newborn diapers. Participants were also introduced to Baby Depot services. Baby Depot is an Institute program that provides diapers, wipes, and formula to families on a quarterly basis..

Institute Supports Mississippi Mothers (continued from page 8)

On March 31 in Indianola, MS, staff debuted the Mom on the Go Bundle. Sponsored by funds from WKKF, baby shower attendees received breast pumps, formula designed to closely resemble breast milk for those experiencing lactation challenges, postpartum pads, WaterWipes, and size 1 diapers. In addition to these items, participants were provided with resources focused on financial stability and education.

IAMH Joins Community Partners to Support Efforts to #WipeOutTheDiaperTax

On March 24, the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health (IAMH) joined other community organizations and advocates in support of efforts to #WipeOutTheDiaperTax. This important advocacy effort shines a light on the financial burden many families face when purchasing essential infant care products such as diapers and wipes.

For many parents and caregivers, diapers are not a luxury. They are a basic necessity. Yet, the added cost of sales tax on these items creates an unnecessary financial strain, particularly for low-income families already working to meet daily needs. By supporting the movement to eliminate the diaper tax, IAMH continues its commitment to advancing health equity and improving the well-being of women, children, and families across Mississippi.



Institute staff supports efforts to end the diaper tax in Mississippi.

The collective call to #WipeOutTheDiaperTax represents more than policy change. It is about dignity, access, and ensuring every child has the healthy start they deserve. Advocacy efforts like these also help raise awareness about the broader challenges many families face when accessing essential resources and healthcare support. Through collaboration and community engagement, IAMH remains committed to supporting policies and initiatives that create healthier, stronger communities for future generations.

April 2026 **Institute and Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated®** **Supports Black Maternal Health Week**

In observance of Black Maternal Health Week, the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health joined Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc.® Rho Lambda Omega Chapter to support more than 40 families during the Healthy Moms, Healthy Futures community event held Saturday, April 18, at Cade Chapel M.B. Church.

Families received valuable information on diaper insecurity, breastfeeding, safe sleep practices, maternal mental health, infant CPR and services that promote healthy pregnancies and early childhood wellness. The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health also distributed Mom on the Go Bundles to new and expectant mothers. The bundles, which included diapers, wipes, breast pumps and formula, were made possible through funding from the Kellogg Foundation (WKKF). The Institute also distributed information regarding the Baby Depot. Baby Depot provides infant essentials for Medicaid-eligible mothers.

Through partnerships with Alpha Kappa Alpha and WKKF, the Institute continues its commitment to reducing maternal and infant health disparities by connecting families with the tools, knowledge and support they need to thrive.

June 2026

Mom on the Go Bundles assist Sunflower families

Smiles, support, and baby essentials filled the room as 50 families were served during the Hello Baby Giveaway in Indianola.

Hosted by the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health at Delta Health Alliance Early Head Start, the event provided expectant and new mothers with free Mom on the Go Bundles. The bundles include free diapers, wipes, and other baby necessities. Families also received valuable information about tobacco-free living, maternal mental health, and community resources that help mothers and babies thrive.

Made possible through funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the MS Dept. of Health, the Hello Baby Giveaway is part of the Institute's ongoing commitment to reducing maternal and child health disparities in Sunflower County. By connecting families with essential supplies and trusted resources, the event helped give babies a healthier start and parents greater confidence as they begin their parenting journey.



During Hello Baby families in Sunflower County received support and resources.

Balanced Man Yoga Experience Encouraged Self-Care for Black Men

Twenty men came together to unplug, recharge, and prioritize their mental well-being during the Balanced Man: A Men's Mental Health Yoga Experience on June 29.

Hosted by the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health at Split Rebel Yoga Studio in Jackson, the free event created a supportive space where participants focused on mental, emotional, and physical wellness. Through guided yoga, mindfulness, and Pilates-inspired movement, attendees learned techniques to reduce stress, improve flexibility, and build healthy habits that support overall well-being.

The event highlighted the importance of addressing the unique mental health challenges many men face and encouraged participants to make self-care a regular part of their wellness journey. "Taking care of your mental health is just as important as taking care of your physical health," said Warren Jones, MPH, with the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health. "This experience encouraged men to slow down, focus on their well-being, and recognize that self-care is an important part of living a healthy life."



Men gathered on the mat for a yoga and pilates

Balanced Man was sponsored by the Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health in collaboration with the University of Mississippi Medical Center's Behavioral Health Institute, Split Rebel Yoga Studio, the Black Men's Health Equity Council, JXN United, Beta Alpha Chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Inc., and Mu Epsilon Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

June 2026

The She Project Helps Baby Depot

The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health (IAMH) is grateful to Dr. Mauda Monger and the She Project for their generous donation of more than 100 baby essentials to the Baby Depot program. The donation included baby mittens, booties, pacifiers and socks that will be distributed to families with infants through Baby Depot.

These gifts will help provide comfort and care for babies while easing the financial burden on parents who are working hard to provide for their children.

The Institute is grateful for thankful for partners like the She Project because they understand that even the smallest acts of kindness can have a lasting impact. Their generosity helps Baby Depot continue supporting families and giving babies a healthier start in life.”

Baby Depot provides diapers, wipes, infant care items and other essential supplies to eligible families throughout Central Mississippi. Through the support of community partners, donors and volunteers, the program continues to meet the growing needs of parents and caregivers while strengthening families across the state.



Dr. Monger and the She Project donated more than 100 baby essentials IAMH's Baby Depot program

Your Voice Matters: Join the Tobacco Coalition Today

Healthy communities don't happen by chance. They happen when people come together to create change. The Institute for the Advancement of Minority Health (IAMH) is inviting residents of Bolivar and Sunflower counties to become part of the Tobacco Coalition and help build a healthier future for everyone.

The coalition brings together residents, healthcare professionals, educators, faith leaders, business owners, parents, youth advocates, and community organizations to reduce tobacco-related health disparities and promote healthier communities. Members work collaboratively to educate the public about the dangers of tobacco and nicotine products, support tobacco cessation efforts, advocate for tobacco-free environments, and help prevent youth tobacco use.

Whether you're a community leader, healthcare provider, educator, or concerned resident, your voice and experience can make a lasting impact. By joining the coalition, you'll work alongside others who are committed to reducing tobacco use, improving health outcomes, and protecting future generations in Bolivar and Sunflower counties.

Be part of the solution. Help create healthier communities where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. For more information or to join the Bolivar/Sunflower County Tobacco Coalition, contact Miracle Vance at mvance@advancingminorityhealth.org.

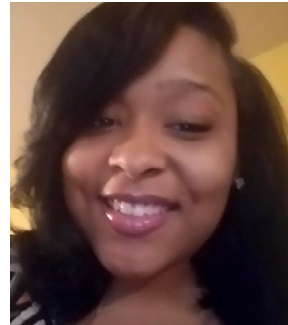
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