

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH



Black History Month is a time to recognize and celebrate the achievements and contributions black Americans have made and continue to make in the United States. Black Americans have a rich history in this country with accomplishments oftentimes in the midst of change and turmoil. Given the current polarizing state of the nation, it is the **resiliency** of the black community that should be celebrated.

Massachusetts' very own Congresswoman [Ayanna Pressley](#) is a prime example of resiliency and determination. In this past election cycle, she is one of 116 women across the United States elected into public service positions and the first black woman in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts elected to Congress. As Boston's first black female City Councilor she formed the Committee on Healthy Women, Families, and Communities, tackling trauma related issues such as domestic violence, child abuse, and human trafficking. Congresswoman Pressley is a survivor of sexual assault. She was raised by a single mother and her father struggled with substance misuse and has had involvement in the criminal justice system. She did not let these experiences define her. Congresswoman Pressley used these experiences to further discussions and confront these issues. Congresswoman Pressley is one of many leaders who are making changes and uniting communities, as opposed to what polarizes us.

The Department of Mental Health (DMH) can use examples of resiliency, whether Congresswoman Pressley, DMH staff or individuals served, as sources of inspiration and motivation. Sharing experiences helps lift voices so the person is being heard, lets others know they are not alone in managing their life's experiences, and aids in eliminating barriers such as stigma or discrimination.

According to the [American Psychiatric Association](#), people from racial/ethnic minority groups are less likely to receive mental health care. For example, in 2015, among adults with any mental illness, 48% of whites received mental health services, compared with 31% of blacks and Hispanics, and 22% of Asians.

DMH strives to engage individuals from diverse backgrounds to understand why they are not receiving services and how those services can be improved. DMH strives to be a data-driven agency where our data can dive deeper to look at the intersections of demographic information to promote change and also celebrate accomplishments. [Carl R. Rogers](#) the father of the [person-centered](#) approach stated, "We think we listen, but very rarely do we listen with real understanding, true empathy. Yet listening, of this very kind, is one of the most potent forces for change that I know."

How can DMH make a difference?

Let's listen to understand and lift the voices and experiences of others.

Here are some helpful resources:

- DMH Office of Race, Equity, and Inclusion – Joy Connell, joy.connell@state.ma.us
- DMH Office of Recovery and Empowerment – Rob Walker, Robert.Walker@state.ma.us
- DMH Office of Communications and Community Engagement – Daniela Trammell, daniela.trammell@state.ma.us

- DMH Office of Human Rights – Startese Simms, Startese.Simms@state.ma.us
- [Mental Health in the Black Community: A Community Conversation](#) (Boston – MGH)
- [Psychology's Unsung Heroines | Psychology Today](#)
- [Blacks United in Recovery](#) (Transformation Center – Boston)
- [Black Mental Health Initiative](#) (William James College)
- [Black & African American Communities and Mental Health](#) (Mental Health America)
- [African American Mental Health](#) (NAMI)
- [Mental Health Disparities: African Americans](#) (American Psychiatric Association)
- [Mental Health and African Americans](#) (US Department of Health and Human Service)
- [Mental Health Disparities: Diverse Populations](#) (American Psychiatric Association)