



Healing the Past, Strengthening the Future

July is Minority Mental Health Awareness Month, offering us an opportunity to reflect not only on mental health today, but also on the historical experiences that continue to shape it. Today, we recognize that individuals and communities do not simply "move on" from adversity. Experiences of discrimination, exclusion, violence, and inequity can leave emotional imprints that are transmitted across generations through family stories, cultural memory, and lived experience.

Our ancestors survived extraordinary hardships. They relied on faith, family, community, music, education, entrepreneurship, storytelling, and collective action to preserve hope and dignity. These strengths remain powerful protective factors today. At the same time, the silence surrounding emotional pain, the stigma of seeking mental health care, and the belief that one simply had to "be strong" often prevented many from receiving the support they deserved. Survival was necessary, but survival alone was not always healing.

Today, we have an opportunity to build upon our ancestors' resilience while embracing what they often lacked access to: trauma-informed care, culturally responsive mental health services, preventive education, and a growing understanding of how adverse experiences affect the mind, body, and relationships. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness—it is an investment in ourselves, our families, and future generations.

This month also invites us to reconsider how we view our young people. Too often, youth who gather in groups or express frustration are quickly labeled as "Youth Takeover" agitators or problems to be managed. While unlawful behavior should always be addressed appropriately, we should also ask a deeper question: **What are our young people trying to communicate?** Many possess leadership qualities, creativity, courage, and a desire to belong. Rather than seeing only risk, we should also recognize their potential.

History reminds us that many of our nation's most influential leaders began as passionate young people who challenged the status quo. Our responsibility is to embrace, protect, educate, mentor, and provide opportunities that help channel youthful energy into constructive leadership, entrepreneurship, public service, the arts, military service, and community engagement. Today's misunderstood teenager may become tomorrow's mayor, entrepreneur, educator, therapist, military officer, or community organizer if someone chooses to invest in them rather than simply dismiss them.

The path forward is both practical and hopeful. We can normalize conversations about mental health, encourage routine emotional well-being check-ins, strengthen families and neighborhoods, expand mentoring opportunities, support schools and community organizations, and create spaces where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued. Healing is not solely an individual responsibility; it is strengthened by healthy relationships, compassionate communities, and equitable opportunities.

Our ancestors taught us how to survive. We have the opportunity to teach future generations how to heal, flourish, and lead.

This Minority Mental Health Awareness Month, let us honor the resilience of those who came before us by caring for ourselves, supporting one another, and investing in the limitless potential of our youth. In doing so, we not only improve mental health—we strengthen families, communities, and the future of our nation.