

The Black Birth Initiative

Join us in advancing maternal health equity and supporting Black birthing communities. Our tiered partnership structure offers meaningful opportunities for visibility, engagement, and impact tied to year-round free, public programming.

Milwaukee, WI

Culture x Design, LLC



The Black Birth Initiative

Health equity and inclusive collaboration are core fundamentals of the Black Birth Initiative. What started in 2020 as a series of film and event programs addressing disparities in Black maternal healthcare culminated in the Black Birth Symposium one year later.

Now grown into a year-round initiative with supporting public events and an interactive professional network, the Black Birth Symposium expands to two days in 2026 to convene leading healthcare professionals and community advocates to advance interdisciplinary collaborations in maternal health. The Initiative, now in its fifth year, is a burgeoning network committed to maintaining the social infrastructure necessary to support the ongoing efforts of regional maternal healthcare providers and expand their work's reach to the broader community.



Why Now: Advancing Maternal Health Equity

Now more than ever, advancing health equity requires coordinated action and cross-sector collaboration.

The current economic and political environment has intensified existing disparities, placing additional strain on healthcare systems, community organizations, and the families they serve. These pressures underscore that equity-focused initiatives cannot be deprioritized in moments of uncertainty. Instead, they necessitate expanded collaboration among clinical institutions, public health agencies, community-based organizations, and policy stakeholders who share responsibility for advancing population health.

In this landscape, the Black Birth Initiative provides a critical mechanism for sustaining momentum-supporting data-informed strategies, amplifying community expertise, and fostering the collective capacity needed to advance measurable and lasting improvements in maternal health equity.





Critical Innovation: A Cross-Disciplinary Maternal Health Network

Bringing together professionals from across healthcare, public health, and community organizations enables knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and coordinated solutions. These connections help address gaps in care, reduce duplication, and ensure programs are responsive to the real needs of communities, ultimately improving outcomes for birthing people and families.

The Black Birth Network connects nearly 500 participants from across disciplines in an inclusive, non-political space that encourages knowledge-sharing and perspective exchange. With statewide reach—nearly 25% of attendees from Madison, Green Bay, and Kenosha—the Network fosters dialogue across different levels of expertise, free from traditional institutional hierarchies.

Connecting the Region & Convening Across the Industry

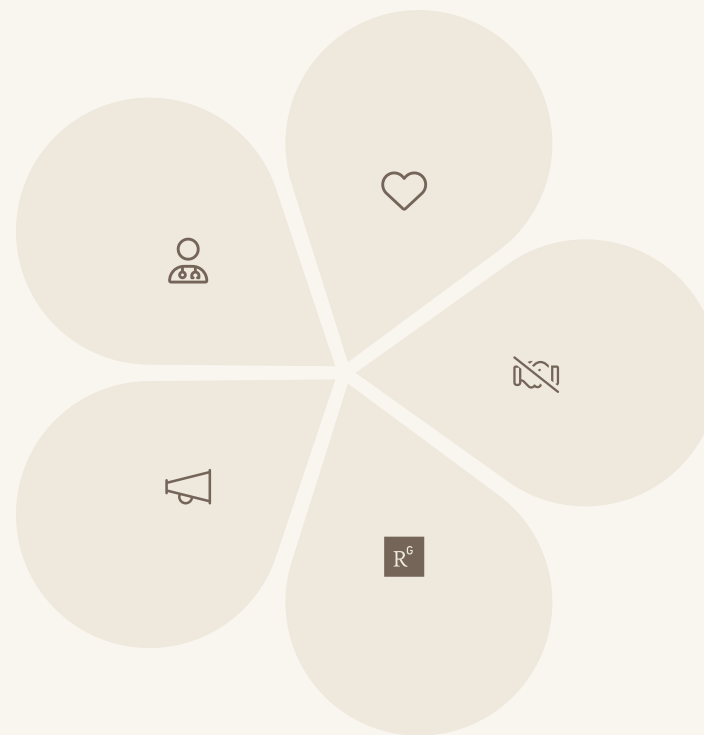
Through these gatherings, participants have gained personal awareness, implemented new protocols, and built meaningful connections that strengthen their work. Convening is not just about sharing space—it's about fostering collective impact through shared power and purpose.

Health Care System Clinicians, Providers, & Administrators

Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin, Advocate Aurora, Children's Wisconsin, Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin, Ascension Health, Sixteenth Street Clinic, Progressive HealthCare, and UW Health.

Policy Makers & Service Providers

Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley, City of Milwaukee Health Department, Empower MKE, Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services, The Office of Senator Tammy Baldwin Office, Public Health Madison and Dane County.



Birth Workers & Support Organizations

Wisconsin Doula of Color Collective, Essentially Empowered, Inc., BOMB Doula, Dad Doula, African American Breastfeeding Network, The Nurturing Collaborative and The Fatherhood Initiative.

Community Initiatives & Case Managers

Wellpoint Care Network, Penfield Children's Center, MCOPP - ACTion Movement Initiative, Unite WI, Next Door Foundation, Molina Healthcare, The Greater Milwaukee Foundation.

Researchers & Academics

The Medical College of Wisconsin, Alverno College, Mount Mary University, UW-Milwaukee, UW-Madison, UBUNTU Research, Marquette University, Milwaukee Area Technical College.



2026 Black Birth Symposium

The Black Birth Symposium brings together healthcare professionals, birth workers, advocates, researchers, social workers, and community members dedicated to advancing maternal health equity.

Day One – Friday, May 8 at the Baird Center

- Keynote address and breakout sessions focused on fostering solution based dialogue on significant maternal health topics
- Self-care activities, onsite resources, partner engagement, and complimentary meals
- Programming shaped by interdisciplinary committees and real community experiences
- Facilitated cross-disciplinary engagement; 270 participants in 2025, with growth expected in 2026

Day Two – Saturday, May 9 at ThriveOn King

- Interactive professional-development workshops for healthcare providers and birth workers
- Resource-focused sessions for mothers, fathers, and families
- Designed to foster dialogue, equitable access, shared understanding, and co-created knowledge

This two-day symposium creates meaningful opportunities for learning, collaboration, and community engagement across the maternal health ecosystem.

Notable Past Symposium Speakers & Contributors



Dr. Tiffany Green, PhD

UW Madison Associate Professor, Dept. of
Population Health Sciences and Obstetrics &
Gynecology



Omari Maynard

Black Maternal Health Advocate and subject of
the documentary AFTERSHOCK



Shawnee Benton Gibson

Black Maternal Health Advocate and subject of
the documentary AFTERSHOCK



Christina Elmore

Black Maternal Health Advocate and Actress on
HBO's INSECURE



Mariah Riddlespringer

Black Maternal Health Advocate, Supporter of
Milwaukee Diaper Mission and Fiancee to NBA
Star Giannis Antetokounmpo



Bruce McIntyre

Black Maternal Health Advocate and subject of
the documentary AFTERSHOCK



Black Birth Forum: Winter Convening (Nov 2026)

The Black Birth Forum extends the impact of the Symposium by bringing participants together throughout the year to reconnect, share updates, and continue critical conversations.

- **Networking + Guided Discussion:** Facilitates collaboration and relationship-building across the maternal health sector
- **In-Person Engagement:** Increases touch points and strengthens connections among professionals and community members
- **Platform for Accountability:** Supports follow-up on initiatives, next steps, and community-driven strategies
- **Consistent Growth:** Expands participation and engagement over time
- **Strategic Location:** Intentionally held in Milwaukee's Near West Side to center community access

The Forum ensures that insights, partnerships, and momentum from the Symposium translate into sustained action and impact.

What's new in 2026?

Symposium Expansion to Two Days

Day Two of the Black Birth Symposium, hosted at ThriveOn King, featuring interactive professional-development workshops and community-focused sessions for mothers, fathers, and families.

Integrated dialogue spaces

Creating dedicated opportunities that bring healthcare professionals and community members together for shared learning, dialogue, and connection.

Birthworker trainings and workshops

Day Two will include hands-on workshops, rich community dialogue, and spaces designed to spark connection across all participants.

Expanded local storytelling

Increased use of healing circles, storytelling and short films, building on last year's BEYOND BIRTH screening, to deepen connection and shared narrative within the Black Birth Initiative.

Programming Focus: A Look Ahead

Guided by ongoing conversations, informative forums, and cross-sector input, the Black Birth Initiative reflects the current needs and innovations in maternal health. Looking ahead to 2026, it will continue to center community-driven solutions, foster collaboration across disciplines, and advance equitable outcomes for birthing families.

Here's a bit of what we're focused on:

Intersection of Maternal and Behavioral Health

Programming will have an increased focus the intersection of maternal and behavioral health, focusing on mental health, substance use, and holistic well-being for Black birthing people.

The Role of Fathers, Partners and Support Systems

Building on past efforts, 2026 will see a greater focus on engaging fathers, partners, and support networks as integral to maternal health, promoting shared responsibility, family well-being, and community connection.

Supporting Healthcare Professionals' Well-Being

2025 survey data revealed high levels of burnout among healthcare professionals across roles, organizations and institutions. In response, programming will place an increased focus on supporting well-being, promoting resilience, and fostering sustainable practices within the maternal health workforce.

Enhanced outreach to rural communities

In response to increased disparities, limited access to care, and the distinct yet connected needs of rural communities, the Black Birth Initiative will increase outreach to rural areas to build connection, support and participation across the state.

Special thanks to previous Black Birth partners including:

- GE Healthcare (Presenting Level)
- City of Milwaukee Health Department (Presenting Level)
- Froedtert & the Medical College of Wisconsin
- Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services
- Milwaukee County Office of Equity
- Children's Wisconsin
- Planned Parenthood of Wisconsin
- Molina Healthcare
- United Healthcare
- DONA International
- Milwaukee County Organizations Promoting Prevention
- Wellpoint Care Network
- Zilber Family Foundation

Interested in being involved?

Whether you're a small nonprofit, a large healthcare system, or an individual advocate for health equity, we welcome partnerships at every level. Reach out to **Maureen Post, Director of Strategic Partnerships**, to explore opportunities. maureen@culturexdesign.com / 414-975-6350