

National Birth Equity Collaborative

<http://birthequity.org>



NBEC founder and president Dr. Joia Crear-Perry, and national training director Carmen Green at the 2016 NCRP Impact Awards.

NCRP: What is NBEC's mission and how does it address infant mortality rates among African-American families?

NBEC: NBEC aims to reduce Black maternal and infant mortality through research, family-centered collaboration and advocacy.

Total U.S. infant mortality has declined in recent decades, but Black infant mortality rates are persistently disproportionate to other race groups. The white infant mortality rate hovers around five per 100,000. The Black infant mortality rate is two to three times that, according to the most recent CDC data.

It is increasingly cited in the medical and public health world that there is more to infant death than clinical care and pre-term related complications. Social determinants of health inequities strongly suggest that institutional racism, community connectedness, the built environment and chronic stress bear the weight of blame. The lack of research toward this end caused us to engage in this work.

Understanding that true health equity starts at birth, we base our work around the family voice, racial equity and multisector collaboration for the greatest impact.

The Campaign for Black Babies aims to reduce Black infant mortality rates by 25 percent and 50 percent in specific cities within five and 10 years, respectively. We have identified 20 cities across the nation with the greatest burden of Black infant death. We have chosen the following subset of those cities as a pilot program to feasibly create an evidence base before expanding: Baltimore, Maryland; Chicago,

Illinois; Clarksdale, Mississippi; Cleveland, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; Memphis, Tennessee and New Orleans, Louisiana.

The Campaign for Black Babies is a national release of the research conducted in these pilot cities. Our research includes independent quantitative analysis and deep community participation to better understand the social and environmental factors behind infant death. We use the analysis and community voices in this report to help state and local health entities reframe their response to reducing infant mortality.

Truly addressing the social determinants cause us to interface with departments of transportation, city planners, housing and development, etc. for multisector collective impact.

NCRP: Why is it important for the organization to engage in advocacy as well as conduct research and provide services?

NBEC: Inequality and health disparities exist because there are weaknesses built into every level of our health care system. Advocacy allows us to collaborate authentically within all of those levels, including hospital systems, state government and federal government.

NBEC understands that we can compound our research efforts and increase our impact exponentially with advocacy engrained in our organization.

NCRP: What roles have foundations played in supporting NBEC's work?

NBEC: Foundations have been invaluable to NBEC's establishment. A W. K. Kellogg Foundation grant for general operational support allowed us to begin working with our pilot cities in 2015. We have experienced major growth and demand in the last year, alone, as we travel and connect with these awesome communities.

This growth could not have been achieved without the consideration of the Kellogg Foundation, and other donors, that believed in our mission and helped get our campaign off the ground.

NCRP: What tips would you offer grantmakers that wish to become effective partners to organizations like yours?

NBEC: We encourage grantmakers to lean toward innovation.

Our largest challenge is that our methodology is based on best practices and promising practices within an emerging framework. There is no evidence base for a program of our type on a multistate scale. Therefore, we are often unqualified in a number of grant opportunities.

We work hard to build a relationship with funders so they see the theory behind our methodology and the passion behind our mission. What better way for philanthropy to help change the world than to be the financial backbone of groundbreaking movements?

We appreciate the network of NCRP partners and members who are on the leading edge of research and advocacy for social good. ■