



# ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN LIFE AND HISTORY

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## 2022 Black History Theme Executive Summary Black Health and Wellness

The theme for 2022 focuses on the importance of Black Health and Wellness. This theme acknowledges the legacy of not only Black scholars and medical practitioners in Western medicine, but also other ways of knowing (e.g., birthworkers, doulas, midwives, naturopaths, herbalists, etc.) throughout the African Diaspora. The 2022 theme considers activities, rituals and initiatives that Black communities have done to be well.

In order to foster good health and wellness Black people have embarked on self-determination, mutual aid and social support initiatives to build hospitals, medical and nursing schools (i.e. Meharry Medical College, Howard University College of Medicine, Provident Hospital and Training School, Morehouse School of Medicine, etc.) and community clinics. Clinics were established by individuals, grassroots organizations and mutual aid societies, such as the African Union Society, National Association of Colored Women and Black Panther Party, to provide spaces for Black people to counter the economic and health disparities and discrimination that are found at mainstream institutions. These disparities and anti-Blackness led to communities developing phrases such as “When white folks catch a cold, Black folks get pneumonia.” Initiatives to help decrease disparities have centered several outcomes, including having more diverse practitioners and representation in all segments of the medical and health programs including such as the Ronald E. McNair Scholars. Even the impact of popular culture texts like *Doc McStuffins* cannot be dismissed.

The rise of fields, such as Public and Community Health and Health Informatics have led to a rise in preventive care and a focus on body positivity, physical exercise, nutrition, exploring other dietary options such as veganism and vegetarianism, and gardening. Black Health and Wellness not only includes one’s physical body, but also emotional and mental health. At this point in the 21st century, our understanding of Black health and wellness is broader and more nuanced than ever. Social media and podcasts, such as *The Read*, hosted by Crissle and *Kid Fury* have normalized talking about mental health and going to therapy as well as initiatives such as *Therapy for Black Girls*. More of us understand the need to hold down, lift up, center, and fight fiercely for our beloved trans siblings and family. Black girls are doing breathwork, and there are whole yoga studios dedicated to people of color.

Mindful of Sister Audre Lorde’s words, we are doing more to move forward holistically for the betterment of ourselves, our bodies, our relationships, our communities, and our planet.

We are determined to create a platform that shines a light on the multiple facets of Black health and wellness through education and activism. There is much to uncover, amplify, question, and correct.

In the still overhanging shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic, Black people should and do use data and other information-sharing modalities to document, decry, and agitate against the interconnected, intersecting inequalities intentionally baked into systems and structures in the U.S. for no other reason than to curtail, circumscribe, and destroy Black well-being in all forms and Black lives. Moreover, Black communities must look to the past to provide the light for our future, by embracing the rituals, traditions and healing modalities of our ancestors. These ways of knowing require a decolonization of thought and practice.

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