

# Change Ideas to Grow, Nurture, and Lift Ideas (CIGNAL)

*For Perinatal Mental and Behavioral Health  
(PMBH)*

Following the successful execution of the Change Ideas to Grow, Nurture, and Lift (CIGNAL) for Maternal Mortality and Morbidity project, the Healthy Start TA & Support Center (TASC) launched a second CIGNAL project focused on Perinatal Mental and Behavioral Health (PMBH). CIGNAL for PMBH aimed to enhance and strengthen the capacity of Healthy Start (HS) grantees to promote PMBH among the women, infants, fathers, and families they serve during and beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

First, TASC hosted a two-hour expert meeting with seven subject matter experts in the field of PMBH. The experts worked to identify and explore potential change ideas related to PMBH for HS communities—specifically challenges associated with PMBH issues among pregnant and postpartum women and their families.

TASC then hosted a webinar for grantees, which discussed the key issues and strategies around PMBH, highlighted stories from HS grantees, and provided participants with resources and tools for testing the strategies in their own communities.

## Challenges Around PMBH for the Healthy Start Community identified by CIGNAL experts

1. The **impact of historical trauma** on **communities of color**.
2. Widespread lack of **informed, respectful, and culturally responsive** care.
3. **Fragmentation** in the mental health services system, which forces people to **rely on health care workers** to pull various services together.
4. **Stigma** and the **lack of a shared language**, which prevents people from **identifying mental health issues** and **promoting wellness** within themselves and their community.
5. Traditional MCH services that **focus solely on the mother and child**, and the **lack of inclusion of the entire family and broader community**.

## Challenges Around PMBH for the Healthy Start Community identified by Healthy Start grantees

1. Provider shortages
2. Inadequate provider support
3. Forming trusted relationships
4. Availability of timely appointments
5. Appointment cancellations
6. Continuing to engage and retain participants connected to mental and behavioral health (especially during COVID-19)
7. Parents not feeling comfortable with being open and transparent with staff about health challenges
8. Overcoming the stigma surrounding receiving mental and behavioral health services

## Expert-identified Strategies FOR ADDRESSING PMBH:

- **Utilize Healthy Start Community Action Networks to create space** for community members and community-based organizations **to be at the table and drive interventions**, without burdening communities.
- **Address trauma** throughout the **perinatal continuum** (before pregnancy and beyond).
- **Create a centralized place** to connect people to **mental and behavioral health services** and **support**.
- Adopt **community-based, culturally supportive** interventions (from the culture, by the culture).
- Recognize the **role of spirituality in forming and sustaining relationships** for communities of color.
- Develop **shared language** around mental health **to combat stigma and shift focus to wholeness and wellness**.

## Grantee-identified Strategies FOR ADDRESSING PMBH IN THE HEALTHY START COMMUNITY:

- Conduct depression screenings and follow up if a referral is needed.
- Hire a full-time Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) who will meet all new participants and educate them on the benefits of mental health care.
- Contact Behavioral Health Counselors (BHCs) and psychiatrists to ensure participants are seen for visits after referrals.
- Facilitate peer-to-peer support.
- Hire a Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP) who can provide assessment evaluations and medication management for enrolled mothers and provide referrals when appropriate.
- Hire full-time medical social workers on staff for participants scoring higher on mental health screenings.

## Case Studies: Healthy Start Projects That Are Actively Addressing PMBH:

### *First TEAM America (Atlanta, Georgia)*

- Community-based non-profit health center
- Serves women and families in Metro Atlanta, with special attention to Atlanta's Neighborhood Planning Unit V (NPU-V)
- Provides holistic care, focused on physical, mental, and economic well-being
- Purpose is to:
  - i. Assess the mental/emotional health challenges of underserved women in Atlanta
  - ii. Examine local priorities and sources of care for mental health among underserved women in Atlanta
  - iii. Utilizes the CAN, which focuses on breastfeeding, early learning literacy/early brain development, and maternal mental health



### *Moms First (Cleveland, Ohio)*

- One of the first 15 Healthy Start projects funded in 1991
- Community Healthy Worker (CHW) program that serves mothers in Cleveland, Ohio
- Work to reduce disparities in infant mortality and poor birth outcomes experienced by Black families
- They have two virtual platforms: one for mom and one for dad, which both launched in 2020
  - i. They were designed to promote behavioral mental health for moms and dads, with a goal to build peer-to-peer support and improve connection for new participants and their Community Health Workers (CHWs).



## Potential Resources & Partnerships

- **Postpartum Support International (PSI)** – provides direct peer support to families, trains professionals, and provides a bridge to connect them
  - [PSI Support Coordinator Network](#)
  - [Online Support Groups](#)
  - [PSI Facebook Group](#)
- **Perinatal Mental Health Alliance for People of Color** – program within PSI geared towards building capacity in the perinatal mental health field to better support families and providers of color around perinatal mood and anxiety disorders
  - <https://www.facebook.com/pmhapoc>
- **Shades of Blue Project** – focuses on improving maternal health outcomes for Black and Brown birthing people
  - [I.N.S.P.I.R.E. Method Training](#)
  - [I.N.S.P.I.R.E. Support Groups](#)
- **Mental Health America** – works to promote mental health as a critical part of overall wellness, including prevention services for all; early identification and intervention; and integrated care, services, and supports.
  - **Mental Health Month** (e.g., fact sheets, social media content)  
<http://www.mhanational.org/may>
  - **Support tools** (e.g., In the Open podcast, DIY tools, articles)  
<http://www.mhascreening.org>
  - **Resources for BIPOC communities**  
<http://www.mhanational.org/bipoc>
  - **Resources for LGBTQ+ communities**  
<https://mhanational.org/issues/lgbtq-communities-and-mental-health>
  - **Resources for youth, parents, and families**  
<https://mhanational.org/back-school>
  - **Resources for college students**  
<https://mhanational.org/life-campus>

## Other Resources

- **Request 1:1 technical assistance** with Quality Improvement Advisor, Jane Taylor, to help your HS project further develop and test change idea strategies. To request TA, visit EPIC, click the “HS EPIC Center Tab” and select “Request Technical Assistance.”
- **Explore the [TASC’s Mental Health Training Opportunities for HS Staff](#)**
  - PSI’s Perinatal Mood and Anxiety Disorders: Components of Care Training
  - National Council for Mental Wellbeing’s Mental Health First Aid for Adults Training
  - Mental Health First Aid Instructor Certification Training
  - Shades of Blue’s I.N.S.P.I.R.E. Method Training
  - Institute for Wellness Education’s Wellness Coaching Certification Training
- **Connect with the TASC** at [healthystart@nichq.org](mailto:healthystart@nichq.org)

