

# Mapping Black Joy: Building a Healing Justice Ecosystem

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# Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature review.....	2
Brief history of Black Minnesotans .....	2
Quality of life indicators .....	3
Organizational responses in times of crisis.....	9
National and governmental responses in times of crisis.....	10
Black joy and healing justice .....	11
Community Wisdom Conversations.....	13
Key findings from Community Wisdom Conversations .....	13
Recommendations.....	25
References.....	27
Appendix.....	32
A. National and governmental organizations and agencies reviewed .....	32
B. Minnesotan organizations and agencies named during community wisdom conversations.....	33
C. State map of Minnesota organizations and agencies reviewed and discussed during Community Wisdom Conversations.....	34
D. Twin Cities area map of Minnesota organizations and agencies named during community wisdom conversations.....	35

# Figures

1. Median household income by racial and ethnic group of the householder, Minnesota 2021.....	4
2. Individuals below the poverty level by racial and ethnic group, Minnesota 2021 .....	5
3. Homeownership rate by racial and ethnic group of the householder, Minnesota 2021.....	6
4. High school students graduating on time by racial and ethnic group, Minnesota 2022.....	7
5. Residents under age 65 without health insurance, Rank of states 2021 .....	7
6. Residents under 65 without health insurance, by racial and ethnic group, Minnesota 2021.....	8
7. 2019 Statewide MSS Mental Well-being, Percentage by race .....	8

# Introduction

In 2023, the Healing Justice Foundation received a pro bono research award from Wilder Research. With this grant, the Healing Justice Foundation and Wilder partnered to carry out a community-centered qualitative research project to begin to describe the behavioral health healing justice ecosystem in Minneapolis/Saint Paul. This project was affirmatively named Mapping Black Joy, and is rooted and grounded in the Orange Method of Healing justice (Lewis, 2018). Dr. Joi Lewis developed the Orange Method (OM) as a framework for healing and connection for Black people. The concept of healing justice weaves together individual and collective mental and emotional healing from trauma, grief, and harm caused by injustice, such as racial inequity and state-sanctioned violence, with work to address and dismantle systemic oppression and violence (Ginwright, 2015).

Founded in December 2019 by Dr. Lewis, the mission of the Healing Justice Foundation (HJF) is to reclaim the inherent dignity, brilliance, and humanity of all Black people. HJF is guided by a Board of four members: Myra Garnes, Dr. Lesa Hammond, Kabir Mohammed, and Kelley Nelson. The Foundation works to provide healing support to Black communities through education, training, mutual aid, and opportunities to connect. A primary goal of HJF is to build a foundation for support for community, cultural healing, mental health, and broader healing justice throughout Minnesota and, ultimately, nationwide.

The idea for this project emerged from a series of collaborative Black-led community engagement and healing justice sessions held by HJF in 2020 and 2021. These sessions were meant to provide an opportunity for Black community members in the Twin Cities to gather for discussion, connection, and healing in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd (Healing Justice Foundation, n.d.).

Sessions focused on the impact of these events on Black communities in the Twin Cities and included local policymakers who have the power or influence to implement the recommendations brought forth by the community through this process. The primary goal of this project was to better understand the current state of mental health resources for Black people in the Twin Cities through key informant interviews with Black healers and community members.

This project has two components: a literature review and a series of conversations with community members (Community Wisdom Conversations). Together, these components provide an exploration of the healing justice ecosystem in the Twin Cities.

## Literature review

The literature review has five sections that provide a framework for understanding the current state of well-being for the Black community in Minnesota.

1. A brief history of Black people in Minnesota: Wilder conducted a literature review to briefly describe the history of Black people in Minnesota. It is important to note that this project focuses specifically and narrowly on Black people in Minnesota who are descendants of people brought to the United States during the North Atlantic slave trade and omits Black people who are recent immigrants or descendants of people who immigrated to the United States from Africa.
2. Quality of life indicators: Minnesota ranks near the top of many indicators typically used to measure quality of life, such as access to health care, education, and poverty. However, racial and economic disparities can be significant. Wilder selected six typical measures of quality of life (income, poverty, homeownership, high school graduation, health care coverage, and mental well-being) to explore racial disparities in well-being for Black Minnesotans.
3. Organizational responses in times of crisis: Wilder reviewed literature related to how formal and informal organizations provide support to Black communities during times of crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and police violence. Both formal and informal organizations, such as law enforcement, social services, and mutual aid/community organizations were included.
4. Governmental responses in times of crisis: Wilder reviewed literature related to how Minnesota city, county, and state agencies responded to Black communities during times of crisis. The review focused specifically on neighborhoods and areas of the Twin Cities where large numbers of Black people live, work, and play.
5. Healing and healing justice rooted in Black liberation: Wilder reviewed literature related to healing justice for Black people, including barriers to accessing mental health and healing justice resources.

## Brief history of Black Minnesotans

Black people have been an integral part of Minnesota's history since its territorial era in the mid-19th century (Burnside, 2023). Their collective struggles, achievements, and challenges provide a rich historical narrative of Black presence in Minnesota. Black people, both those born in the state and those who migrated from other states in search of better opportunities and freedom, played significant roles in the state's development and growth. For example, George Bonga, the son of an African American fur trader and an Ojibwe woman, became a prominent interpreter, guide, and entrepreneur in the fur trade

industry. His presence highlights the early contributions of African Americans to Minnesota's economy and cultural exchange (Burnside, 2023). During the early settlement period, Black communities in Minnesota were concentrated in urban centers such as Saint Paul and Minneapolis, as well as in smaller towns across the state. Churches, neighborhoods, and cultural institutions often served as focal points for these communities, offering a sense of identity and support.

Today, more than 325,000 Black Minnesotans are dispersed across various neighborhoods and communities throughout the state, reflecting evolving settlement patterns and increased integration within the broader fabric of Minnesota society. Highlighting this dispersion, (Citywide community engagement, n.d.) underlines the importance of community engagement and its central role in preserving African American history and cultural sites. Through this engagement process, the diverse locations where Black communities exist within the state are revealed, highlighting the ongoing presence and contributions of Black individuals to Minnesota's social, cultural, and economic landscapes. A notable example illustrating this evolution is the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood in Minneapolis, which has emerged as a diverse hub with a significant African American population. In addition to African American residents, the neighborhood is also home to many immigrants from Somalia, Sudan, and other African countries, showcasing the cultural diversity and evolving settlement patterns within Minnesota.

## Quality of life indicators

A variety of metrics are used in academic and policy literature to describe individual quality of life, such as educational attainment, wealth, income, housing status, employment status, and access to health care. For this project, Wilder and Healing Justice Foundation selected five measures of well-being to explore disparities between Black and White Minnesotans. This data was pulled from Wilder's Minnesota Compass database, which compiles, analyzes, and interprets data to show how Minnesotans fare on key issues that impact quality of life.

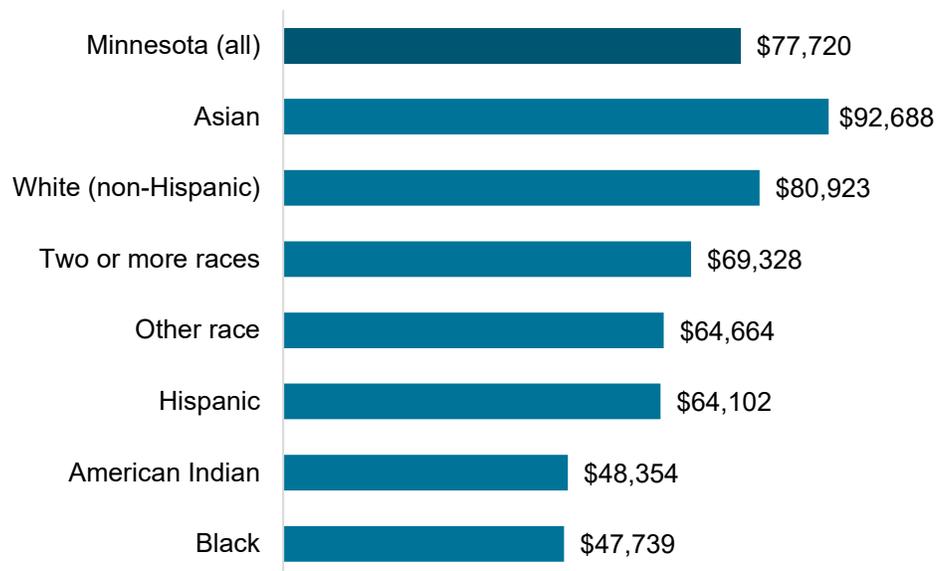
In 2023, the U.S. News and World Report ranked Minnesota fifth in the nation for quality of life (U.S. News and World Report, n.d.). Minnesota has a higher life expectancy than most other states (National Center for Health Statistics, 2022), and has lower levels of poverty (3rd in the United States; Minnesota Compass, 2021b). However, when looking at these quality of life indicators across different racial or ethnic groups or other marginalized identities, disparities become apparent. Many studies have shown that there are structural and systemic factors (e.g., racism and discriminatory practices) that lead to disparities in quality of life indicators (Hardeman et al., 2022; Wrigley-Field et al., 2021; Wrigley-Field et al., 2020; Nega et al., 2013). We selected the following indicators to measure

quality of life in Minnesota: income, poverty, homeownership, high school graduation, health care coverage, and mental well-being.

## Income

Income is often used to measure individual economic stability and ability to meet basic needs such as food and housing (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d. a; Child Welfare League of America, 2021). A higher income can be associated with a better quality of life (Zhang & Xiang, 2019). Minnesota ranks in the top 20 states with a median income of \$77,720 (Minnesota Compass, 1989-2021), yet racial disparities persist. As shown in Figure 1, the overall median income for White Minnesotans is \$80,923, but for Black Minnesotans it is \$47,739 (Minnesota Compass, 1989-2021). Since the late 2000s, the gap between households with low-income and high-income has continued to grow (Biegler & Madden, 2012). For example, households with incomes in the top 5% have household incomes that are 11 times greater than those with incomes in the bottom 20% of household incomes. Despite Minnesota’s comparatively high median income, disparities persist.

### 1. Median household income by racial and ethnic group of the householder, Minnesota 2021

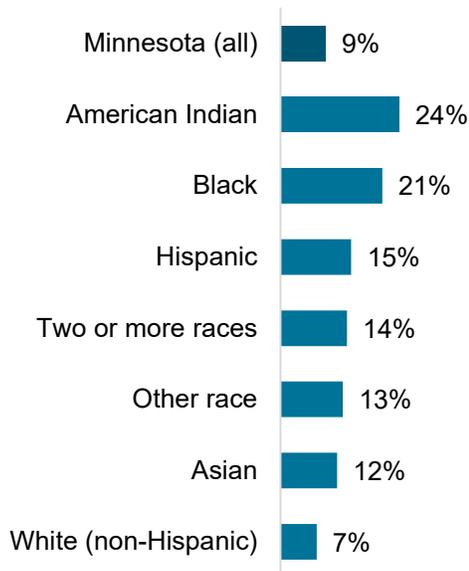


Source: Compass

## Poverty

Along with income, poverty is often used as a measure of economic well-being or stability. People living in communities with higher poverty levels “often have reduced access to resources that are needed to support a healthy quality of life, such as stable housing, healthy foods, and safe neighborhoods” (Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, n.d. b, para. 2). Minnesota has one of the lowest poverty levels in the nation (Minnesota Compass, 2021b). Despite this, Minnesota ranks third in the nation in terms of the poverty rate gap between Black and White citizens (McCann, 2023). In fact, 7.4% of White Minnesotans have incomes below the poverty level compared to 20.9% for Black Minnesotans (Figure 2; Minnesota Compass, 2021a). Residential segregation is a key factor contributing to the racial wealth gap, which can be connected back to the racial covenants (clauses in property deeds to specifically prevent Black people from buying homes) in Minnesota that predominantly affected Black Minnesotans (Shapiro et al., 2013).

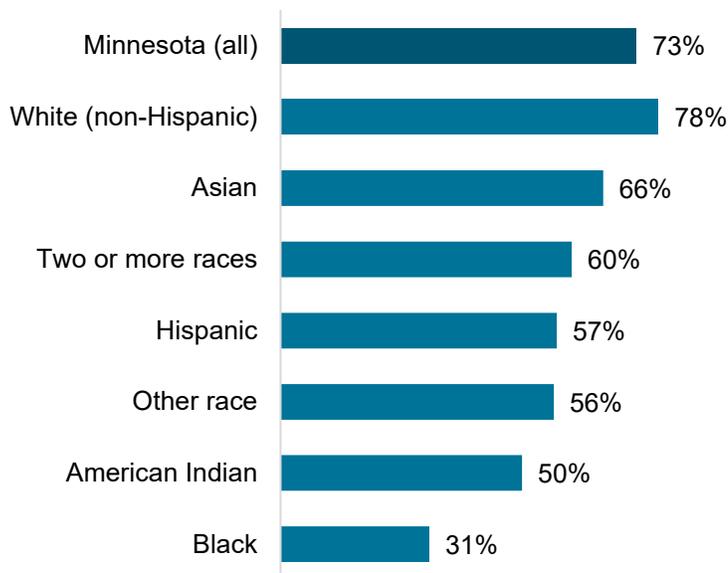
### 2. Individuals below the poverty level by racial and ethnic group, Minnesota 2021



## Homeownership

Stable housing can also impact quality of life. Owning a home includes many social benefits like improvements to an individual’s life satisfaction and psychological health (Rohe & Lindblad, 2013). The residential stability stemming from owning your own home also allows for lower exposure to crime and better performance in schools for children (Rohe & Lindblad, 2013). Currently, Minnesota ranks 38<sup>th</sup> in homeownership gaps (Minnesota Compass, 1990-2021). Minnesota Compass defines the homeownership gap as, “the difference between homeownership rates for non-Hispanic white householders and householders of color” (Minnesota Compass, 1990-2021). It is important to note that the homeownership rate in Minnesota is higher for White people than People of Color (Figure 3). Black Minnesotan householders have the lowest homeownership rate with 30.5% of Black people owning homes.

### 3. Homeownership rate by racial and ethnic group of the householder, Minnesota 2021

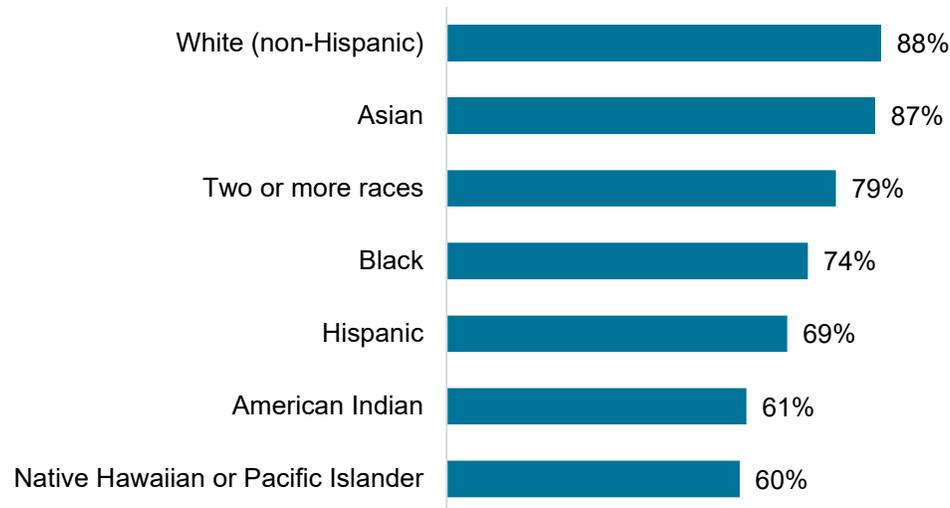


## High school graduation

High school graduation can contribute to a higher income and better access to health care (American Public Health Association, 2023). Minnesota Compass uses high school graduation rates as a method to understand how prepared Minnesotan students are for future academic and workforce success. As a state that is known for high-quality public education, it is crucial to note Minnesota still struggles with the achievement gap especially in Black and Indigenous students (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2021). Completion of high school is associated with positive impacts to health and overall quality of life (e.g., more employment opportunities and higher wages; Minnesota Compass, n.d.). Minnesota ranks 32<sup>nd</sup> among states for high school students graduating

on time (Minnesota Office of Higher Education, 2021). When looking specifically at Black Minnesota students, 73.5% graduate high school on time (Figure 4).

#### 4. High school students graduating on time by racial and ethnic group, Minnesota 2022



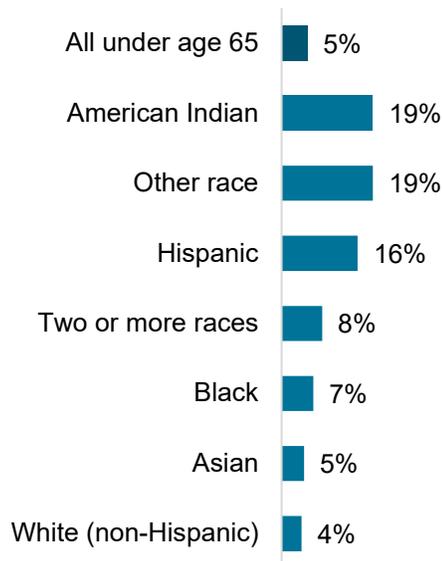
#### Health care coverage

Health care coverage is often associated with better health outcomes and reduced mortality rates (American Hospital Association, 2019). Minnesota ranks 5<sup>th</sup> in health care coverage with only 5% of the population under 65 lacking health care coverage (Figure 5; Minnesota Compass, 2008-2021). Figure 6 shows that only 6.5% of Minnesota residents under 65 without health care coverage identify as Black. A lower percentage of White Minnesotans lack health care coverage compared to Black, American Indian, and multiracial residents.

#### 5. Residents under age 65 without health insurance, Rank of states 2021

Rank	State (1=lowest)	2021
1	Massachusetts	2.9%
2	Vermont	4.5%
3	Hawaii	4.8%
4	Rhode Island	5.1%
<b>5</b>	<b>Minnesota</b>	<b>5.3%</b>
6	Iowa	5.8%
7	Michigan	6.0%
8	Connecticut	6.1%
9	New York	6.1%
10	New Hampshire	6.2%

## 6. Residents under 65 without health insurance, by racial and ethnic group, Minnesota 2021



### *Mental well-being*

Minnesota Compass has limited data on mental health indicators, so for the purpose of measuring mental health for Black Minnesotans, we utilized mental well-being indicators from the Minnesota State Survey (Minnesota Department of Health, 2023). Mental well-being is an indicator that can be used to understand how well Black Minnesotans are coping with stress and functioning in school, work, health, and community life (Long et al., 2020). Poor mental health can be associated with a higher risk of chronic disease and substance abuse. We chose three indicators from the MSS to assess youth mental health, including: a sense of belonging, perceived ability to form trusting and caring relationships with peers, and having a loving relationship with a parent/guardian (Long et al., 2020; Schwager et al., 2020; Khodabakhsh et al., 2014). Figure 7 shows that 48% of Black Minnesota students indicated a sense of belonging to a community compared to 62% of White students and 57% of students overall. In addition, 74% of Black students described themselves as having the ability to form trusting and caring relationships with their peers, which is lower than White students (86%) and Minnesota students overall (83%). Lastly, 78% of Black students felt they had a supportive and loving relationship with one or both of their parents compared to 90% of White students.

## 7. 2019 Statewide MSS Mental Well-being, Percentage by race

	Black	White	Percentage point difference	All Minnesota youth
Sense of belonging (Social Integration)	48%	62%	14%	57%
Peer relationships	74%	86%	12%	83%
Parent relationships	78%	90%	12%	87%

The six quality of life indicators selected to describe what it means to do well in Minnesota paint a picture of a comparably healthy state. However, when looking at these indicators by racial group or income level, it is apparent that there are many disparities that indicate not everyone in Minnesota is doing well (Myers, 2021).

## Organizational responses in times of crisis

In March 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially announced the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak as a global pandemic. This led Governor Tim Walz to declare a state of emergency where local, city, and state resources were mobilized to safeguard the health and well-being of Minnesota's citizens. In addition to this declaration, schools, restaurants, theaters, and other places of public accommodation were instructed to close down. This mandate required everyone who was not an essential or emergency worker to stay at home.

This global pandemic had a significant impact on Black Minnesotans who were already a historically marginalized population. Multiple studies show that Black deaths from COVID-19 infection were significantly higher than White deaths (Ford et al., 2020; Ndugga et al., 2022). As described above, before the pandemic, Black community members in Minnesota often did not enjoy the same benefits of good health and quality of life as White people in Minnesota. These disparities were made worse by the pandemic, resulting in increased rates of chronic disease, injury, and violence for Black people (Ndugga et al., 2022). Inequities in health and well-being were exacerbated by the impact of the pandemic. Black people were particularly vulnerable to COVID-19 infection and its collateral consequences, such as: layoffs, lack of child care, housing displacement and evictions, food insecurity, and social isolation (Yancy, 2020). These detrimental results of the pandemic also had a significant impact on the mental health of Black Minnesotans (Minnesota Department of Health, 2022). This was especially evident with the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis during the pandemic.

In May 2020, the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis sparked a significant global racial justice movement (Silverstein, 2021). This brutal murder shone a light on the racial injustice experienced by Black Minnesotans (Myers, 2021). It highlighted the racial disparities experienced throughout the state and the impact they have on quality of life. The pandemic and the murder of George Floyd demonstrated the deeper issues Black Minnesotans experience historically and currently at the hand of local, city, and state policies and practices (Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development, 2022). In addition to exposing this structural racism, it displayed the lack of proper healing and well-being resources for Black Minnesotans in times of crisis. As a population substantially impacted by these events, there was not enough aid in place to assist people

through these traumatic times. Black community members were living in communities that no longer had access to a grocery store or other basic needs (Jackson, 2021). This created issues like food insecurity and had a significant toll on mental health. Many organizations created programs and resources in response, but they were not there initially. The next section explores organizational and governmental responses in times of crisis.

Wilder reviewed 35 articles that discussed what resources were provided to Minnesotans during the pandemic and the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. In addition, the articles listed some of the organizations that remained open during the pandemic. Some of the organizations like the Cultural Wellness Center, Maji Ya Chai Land Sanctuary, Hallie Q. Brown Community Center, and the Phyllis Wheatley Community Center existed prior to these times of crisis. Their focus was on assisting Black Minnesotans in a variety of ways (e.g., senior programs, restorative programs, and youth programs) in order to improve the quality life of those in their communities. Many of these organizations shifted from their normal programming to focus on the imminent needs of their community members (e.g., mental health resources, mutual aid, and food shelves or free meal campaigns). In addition to these pre-pandemic organizations, there are an abundance of organizations like ZaRah Wellness Center and Black Collective Foundation MN that were created in the wake of these crises. The majority of these organizations focused on physical and mental health and general well-being of Black community members in Minnesota. While this time of crisis highlighted the existing issues Black Minnesotans faced, it also helped highlight that these issues were persistent prior to the pandemic and the racial uprising.

## National and governmental responses in times of crisis

To explore the national and governmental response in times of crisis, 15 national and governmental organizations and agencies were reviewed (See Appendix for a complete list of organizations). The majority of these organizations and agencies had a directory for Black Americans to refer to when needing mental health and healing resources. These directories helped them find Black therapists, doulas, yoga teachers, mediators, and more by state. In addition to these directories, many of these organizations and agencies offered resources such as crisis hotlines, wellness videos, podcasts, and classes. The resources highlighted healing justice, Black joy and Black liberation. They offered an avenue to highlight the needs of Black Americans and the importance of Black mental health.

On the governmental level, there were policies and programs (e.g., American Rescue Plan and Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act) that provided federal funding for states and organizations to help Americans through the pandemic. States, cities, and counties utilized the programs in a variety of ways, some of which

benefited Black communities. However, a lack of rigorous auditing meant there was often not a way to ensure resources were being given to those who needed it most (Associated Press, 2023).

Despite the abundance of organizational, national, and governmental responses in times of crisis, Black Minnesotans continued to struggle physically and mentally during the pandemic. The pandemic exacerbated issues that Black community members were facing and have been historically facing (e.g., food insecurity, air pollution, housing insecurity, and lack of wealth). These organizations were helpful in times of crisis, but in order to properly improve the quality of life of Black Minnesotans there is a need for preventative resources that remove barriers from the lives of Black community members so when a crisis occurs they are physically and mentally prepared. As the Red Cross helps Americans in times of crisis, Healing Justice Foundation strives to create a system for Black folks that emphasizes Black joy, healing justice, and black liberation. It is important to also listen to Black Minnesotans to understand what needs are unmet and the future they want in Minnesota. The findings from the Community Wisdom Conversations can help shape a healing justice ecosystem for all Black Minnesotans.

## Black joy and healing justice

The data above depict disparities for Black Minnesotans, but conversations with Black healers in Minneapolis and St. Paul included descriptions of Black joy and power. The above indicators are one way of describing Black life in Minnesota, but our Community Wisdom Conversations reveal a much more complex picture of the way Black people thrive in the Twin Cities. Black joy is a framework that accentuates Black experiences, actions, and expression of joy.

*It is the birthright of Black people to live in a world where they can thrive as their whole, full selves. It is the duty of those in power to open (and make accessible) the avenues, resources, and relationships for that birthright to be realized. 2021 was a pivotal time in the movement to see racial justice and radical healing take its rightful place in our world. ... We are building on the work through this project - By growing a healing ecosystem.- Time of Reckoning: Phase II: Listening to Accountability — Healing Justice Foundation (Dr. Brittany Lewis, Research in Action, 2021)*

Throughout history, Black people have overcome and maintained resilience by using Black joy and healing justice to transform despite the oppressive systems of slavery, colonialism, and other traumas, (James et al., 2022; Vilankulu, 2019; Marsh 2023).

Healing justice is an approach to mental and emotional well-being that integrates healing from communal grief and trauma with liberation from oppressive systems (Lewis, 2018;

Page & Raffo, 2013). The healing justice framework was made popular by Cara Page, a Black Queer Feminist, and presents a holistic approach to acknowledge stress and healing from the impacts of historical, generational, or contemporary trauma (Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality and Healing, 2023).

Healing justice in Minnesota involves a collective effort by people and organizations to address the well-being and liberation of the Black community. Several community organizations, wellness centers, and activist groups in the Twin Cities are actively engaged in promoting healing justice in the state (Minnesota Humanities Center, 2023; French et al., 2023; Jackson, 2023). These entities provide a range of services aimed at fostering healing and liberation. Workshops, conferences, panel discussions, counseling services, mental health support, community outreach programs, and wellness programs are among the offerings that address the specific needs of Black individuals and communities (Jackson, 2023; James et al., 2022).

Integrating mental health and well-being with liberation from oppression allows for a critical evaluation of challenge areas for Black people, including stigma, discrimination, and a lack of culturally competent care in the mental health care system, as well as a critical shortage of Black mental health professionals (Roth, 2020). Identifying and meeting these needs is essential for achieving healing justice and centering Black liberation.

# Community Wisdom Conversations

Wilder Research conducted 17 interviews (called Community Wisdom Conversations) with community members who are engaged in community/cultural healing and mental health in the Black community to better understand the current healing justice ecosystem in Minnesota. Wilder developed an interview protocol in consultation with the Healing Justice Foundation team. These interviews focused on the spaces where Black people are being supported, where they are thriving, and where there are gaps in accessing healing and mental health services. At the end of the interviews, Wilder staff completed a short demographic questionnaire with the participants. Those who completed an interview received a \$20 Visa gift card to express our appreciation for their time and assistance.

## Key findings from Community Wisdom Conversations

### *Participant information*

Seventeen Community Wisdom Conversations were conducted in May and June 2023. There were 10 conversations with individual community members and seven conversations with leaders of community organizations. The majority of the participants identified as Black/African American. One participant identified as Black/African American and multiracial while another identified as Foundational American/Aboriginal American. Only one participant identified as having a disability or chronic condition. All participants lived or served in the Minneapolis or Saint Paul area. Five participants identified as male and 12 identified as female. Almost half the participants were between age 35-49, with four selecting 18-34 and an additional four choosing 50-64. One participant was 65 and older.

## Role in the Black community

Participants had a variety of roles in the Black community that maintained, restored, and invited Black joy through community cultural healing and mental health services. The roles included volunteer positions, employee roles, and hybrid roles. Some people focused on community engagement around Black and Brown mental health, while others provided different mental health resources (e.g., healing circles). Some of the participants discussed the importance of the work they are doing centering Black joy and healing justice. This focus and commitment in some instances led them to do the work for free in an effort to benefit the community. For example, one participant shared:

*So that's a little bit of my 9 to 5, but my community work is a lot of healing circles, panel and just curating safe spaces for people to talk about the hard stuff...and so in doing that allowing them to speak about their trauma, but not staying there. And so then we move into more of a healing and more into the healing. So, yes, we could talk about especially marginalized folks we could talk about trauma throwing through. We know that we have 500+ years of trauma and our DNA, but how are we going to get to our healing? And so, yes, I'll have these different healing circles or these different events talking about our trauma, but then trauma is also always infused. How are we going to get to our healing? How are we going to show up for ourselves? How does self-care look for us?*

### Participant Roles in the Black Community:

- Private practice therapist
- Black and Brown mental health speaker
- Physical conferencing facilitator
- Hennepin County CPS neutral party
- Collaborative homeless shelter program staff in Hennepin County
- Minneapolis City Council member
- State Certified Peer Recovery Specialist
- Recovery community organization staff
- Staff at homeless youth drop in center
- Staff at a non-profit center for men 18-30 from African culture and diaspora
- Founder of Root to Crown healing
- Founder of Naturally Abundant Living
- Founder and CEO for the Black women's wealth Alliance
- Pastor

## What does Black joy and healing justice mean for African Americans in your community?

Participants described Black joy and healing in many different ways. The majority of participants used the words freedom or liberation to describe what it means to them. They said the ability to be free and not having to struggle to exist is a form of Black joy and healing. This includes shifting from survival mode to freely living life without judgment and unprocessed trauma. Meeting the basic needs of homeownership, health care coverage, income, and high school graduation can directly influence Black joy and healing justice. In addition, the freedom and liberation to grow, supported and loved by themselves and

other Black community members was cited as important. Participants talked about having the freedom to embrace cultural identity and to be unapologetic and expressive. It was expressed in a Community Wisdom Conversation like this:

*Black joy is to be out of survival mode and to just roll and be free to be yourself. A lot of times Black bodies are worried about being judged, worried or carrying the trauma of their past and generational past traumas. I think being able to find liberation and just simply being present that's Black joy. Whether you're smiling, laughing, and reading a book, I think cultivating Black joy is personalized based on who's dealing with it. But I think when it all comes down to it, it's freedom to just be, not to have the worries of the world or, or your day or the future on us to simply be present.*

Some participants also noted Black joy and healing as access to joy, laughter, and shared experiences that center healing around entertainment, activities, and food. Black joy and healing are building community and connections. This includes dedicated institutions that offer mental health services for Black people. Participants described equal and equitable spaces to embrace Black joy and healing, which include programs for overlooked communities (e.g., incarcerated individuals). Lastly, Black joy and healing includes more youth programs and child care to address mental health and healing in the younger Black population. One participant explained:

*It means growing, loving, supporting, blooming, fruiting, and being natural again with each other, ourselves, with the land, and the universe. I just want us to be able to live before we die. I just want people to be able to feel and be able to tell stories and cook food and of celebrations of birth and death and everything in between.*

***Please describe your work/organization and how it maintains, restores, or invites Black joy through community cultural healing or mental health services for Black Minnesotans.***

During the Community Wisdom Conversations, participants highlighted numerous services and resources that they provide to support the Black community and access Black joy and healing justice. In addition, there many organizations that were mentioned through Minnesota and specifically the Twin Cities area (See Appendix for a complete list and map of organizations and agencies named during the Community Wisdom Conversations). The healing modalities were abundant, such as: healing circles, yoga classes, and movement classes. These offerings support Black health healing from intergenerational trauma and racism. These services and resources provide Black people the space and opportunity to practice Black liberation and healing justice in a space reserved for Black people. One participant describe the space in this way:

*I use art to create space for people to be more vulnerable. People to slow down and to deepen their self-awareness and communal awareness. I think artists are uniquely positioned.*

Another participant said:

*To slow people down and show me what's possible. Lot of times people will go through life on autopilot. But they'll be complacent and complying with the status quo and what's going on within or around them and their environment. They are just not very aware of it. They are just kind of going on like, we get sucked into this, this pace of business as usual or the pace of trauma. I have to say that all the work that I do moves with the patient relationship. So, it's like, we ought to slow down and pay attention to this long enough to hear the heartbeat.*

### ***Please describe the space that you are serving and where you are located in Minnesota.***

There was a variety of diverse spaces utilized to offer services throughout the Twin Cities. These spaces included office buildings, community centers, personal homes, as well as Black nonprofit organizations and businesses. Healers and practitioners worked in specific Black areas and neighborhoods in the Twin Cities such as: North and Cedar Riverside neighborhoods in Minneapolis, as well as Rondo, Frogtown, and East neighborhoods in Saint Paul. Further, participants utilized churches, mosques, and schools as spaces to hold space and provide programs and services. These various settings enabled them to engage with and serve a wide range of Black people across the community in deeply accessible ways.

### ***How are Black folks hearing about or finding programs or services from you or your organization?***

Participants revealed multiple avenues through which Black folks hear about and receive programs or services from them or their organizations. The primary and most commonly mentioned method is through word of mouth. This indicates that personal recommendations and referrals are critical to reaching out to Black people. Social media platforms, particularly Facebook (including therapist networking groups) and Instagram are also significant channels for engagement and information dissemination. Additionally, paper and digital materials like flyers, brochures, and pamphlets are distributed at organizations and local businesses, ensuring wider visibility and accessibility. Networking and establishing partnerships with other professionals and community organizations helped to expand outreach efforts and connect with diverse audiences. Furthermore, radio stations and podcasts served as mediums to reach Black individuals through audio content. Lastly, community leaders within churches and barbershops were influential in spreading the word and facilitating community engagement. One participant shared:

*I'm in a therapist networking group on Facebook. And so people will post like, "Hey, someone is looking for a Black therapist, around anxiety or around grief," or around whatever topic.*

## *Did you offer any particular programs or services during the pandemic?*

During the pandemic, participants offered a wide range of programs and services to address the unique challenges faced by their communities. Multiple participants mentioned the provision of virtual healing circles, yoga classes, meditation sessions, and cardio classes conducted through Zoom, aiming to support mental and physical well-being during crises. Unique events that participants either offered or attended included:

- A food program focused on neighborhoods that lacked access to grocery stores and places to buy fresh food
- An event that offered plant-based meals and an outdoor movie event during the pandemic, combining healthy food options with cultural activities
- Virtual Radical Joy Open Mic Nights and Concerts to uplift spirits and share artistic gifts in a virtual environment
- An Indigenous, Black, and Women of Color Yoga and Writing Project was conducted through Zoom, offering a safe space for self-expression and empowerment
- Establishment of a Healing Room
- Race, class, and gender narrative trainings
- A Hotel Housing Program for the homeless population
- Recovery-focused programs to support BIPOC businesses during the pandemic
- COVID-19 vaccine programs
- A women's empowerment and healing retreat
- Eviction moratorium and rental assistance programs
- Racial trauma services
- Grief and transition services
- A health and wellness-oriented festival
- Community wellness parties
- Financial assistance for housing
- Business support services

*Our work was focused more on financial assistance in the business and housing area. So with housing we helped individual workers students and businesses with rent and mortgage assistance, sometimes relocation support... With businesses we assisted with a lot of transitioning, especially in the beauty and wellness industry...So we provided them with technical support and connected them to resources.*

*Right before COVID but we were able to navigate and to host the very first V fest. That's the best of our health and wellness oriented [programs].*

## ***Did you offer any particular programs or services during the racial uprising and murders of Black bodies (e.g., George Floyd, Daunte Wright, and others)?***

During the racial uprising and the tragic killings of Black individuals such as George Floyd and Daunte Wright, participants offered a range of programs and services to support their communities. Virtual healing circles through platforms like Zoom were organized to provide spaces for individuals to come together and find solace. Opportunities for expressing feelings were provided in virtual formats. Safe community spaces were established to create a supportive environment where individuals could drop by and find support. Venting circles and guided/facilitated dialogues on the events that unfolded were conducted to facilitate open conversations and understanding. Opportunities facilitated or attended by participants included:

- The “Time of Reckoning” initiative aimed to address the experiences of burnout, anger, frustration, and injustice faced by individuals in the wake of the uprising, offered by the Healing Justice Foundation
- A Women of Color, Indigenous, and Black Women Yoga Project offered a dedicated space for healing and empowerment through yoga
- Race, class, and gender narrative training sessions with public officials and legislators
- Black Home Conferences that provided support
- Open spaces for expression, support, and community engagement in various Minneapolis wards
- Safety conversations in Minneapolis and Cedar Riverside to explore the vision of a safe community beyond policing
- Advocacy for public safety initiatives as an alternative to traditional policing
- Yoga classes provided specifically for the Black women
- Presentations and talks featuring psychotherapists, artists, and speakers

One respondent shared:

*We had two psychotherapists speak about the history of mental health in the community.*

*We opened space here in the church for people to come and express themselves, to grieve and express their anger, and to be comforted and pray for and do 1-1 so that we could help bring some kind of comfort healing and assurance to people as they were struggling during that time.*

## **How often are your services or resources accessed by your Black community members?**

According to the participants, the frequency of accessing services or resources by the Black community members varied. The majority of participants stated that their resources and services were accessed almost daily, indicating a consistent and ongoing demand within the community. However, some participants expressed a desire for increased access to their resources and services. They suggested strategies such as door knocking and advertising in Black community spaces to reach a broader audience.

Additionally, some participants noted that there was a higher demand for services during specific periods. For instance, winter was mentioned as a time of increased demand due to factors like seasonal depression, lack of vitamin D, and a need for community connection. Others mentioned accessing services on a weekly or monthly basis. Furthermore, there was a recognition of increased demand during holidays, especially in January. Other participants mentioned that they experienced higher demand for their services and resources whenever there were deaths and funerals. It was expressed in this way:

*I would say daily, there is sometimes where it's weekly, but it is daily.*

*I would say probably January, I get a big increase of folks too, after the holidays and its middle of the winter and stuff like that.*

*I don't know if there is particular time, but holidays are difficult for people and the seasons of death when people have lost ones and were seen more frequently.”*

## **What are your needs and the needs of those in your community to improve the quality of mental health and healing?**

### **Increased access to mental health resources**

When asked about the needs to improve the quality of mental health and healing in their communities, participants provided various insights. The majority emphasized the crucial need for increased access to mental health resources. They stressed the importance of having more Black and Brown therapists to improve representation and encourage people to seek mental health support. Some participants also highlighted the need for assistance with licensing and exams for Black and Brown therapists to overcome barriers to entry in the field. Furthermore, participants expressed the need for more resources and support to prevent burnout and suicide among Black and Brown therapists, as their numbers remain disproportionately small compared to the overall Black population in Minnesota.

### **More financial and community support**

Financial support, community support through donations and soliciting funds for therapy, and access to necessary resources and tools were mentioned as essential components for

enhancing mental health services. Participants also emphasized the importance of creating experimental opportunities, such as more spaces like green spaces, and increasing mental health professionals or providing mental health training for staff at homeless shelters, along with culturally competent staffing.

### **Meeting basic needs of Black community members**

Addressing the basic needs of individuals, such as housing security, better housing, improved air quality, and livable wages, was recognized as crucial for overall mental health well-being. Participants advocated for shifting funding towards meeting these basic needs, which can alleviate mental distress and contribute to a better quality of life. They also highlighted the need for more resources and safe spaces for healing to occur comfortably.

### **More Black mental health professionals and support for them**

Additional needs mentioned included recruiting and supporting more Black practitioners and staff, establishing consistent and dedicated safe spaces, promoting restorative justice and addressing harm to the Black community, destigmatizing mental health in Black communities (especially for Black men), advocating for laws, bills, and policies to expand access and funding for mental health resources, making concrete changes to improve living conditions and remove barriers to reaching mental and emotional stability, and fostering collaboration and capacity-building. Creating a healing-centered atmosphere and addressing staffing and time commitment were also seen as vital aspects of improving mental health and healing within their communities.

### ***What are the challenges to addressing mental health and healing in the Black community in Minnesota?***

Participants had many examples of challenges to addressing mental health and healing in the Black community in Minnesota. The majority of the participants highlighted the issue of limited Black and Brown therapists for the Black community. Black therapists are highly underrepresented in Minnesota and in the United States. Only 4% of therapists in the United States and 2% of therapists in Minnesota identify as Black or Brown (Schwager et al., 2020). This is a staggering mental health disparity when Black people make up 14% of the United States and 8% of Minnesota's population.

More Black therapists would lead to more representation as well as options for cultural responsiveness or appropriate mental health resources. Some participants reported that mental health resources and services often utilize a Eurocentric approach, which does not always align with Black liberation. The influence of White supremacy and racism on

mental health resources and services, which is perpetuated by Eurocentric mental health services was a challenge discussed in the conversations. The lack of culturally responsive and appropriate mental health resources creates a challenge of access and prevents Black community members from using resources beneficial to their mental health and healing. One participant shared:

*So just really getting us to a place where it's completely normalized to see mental health providers, to have therapy, not just seek therapy. Because we do tend to have such a lack of Black mental health providers, Black therapists, Black counselors, culturally competent mental health providers.*

In addition to the lack of Black and Brown therapists and culturally appropriate resources, participants noted the absence of education around mental health and mental health symptoms. If people do not have the knowledge and understanding about mental health, it is difficult to recognize it or make positive changes. The lack of education often leads to stigma around mental health, which was another challenge participants mentioned during the Wisdom Conversations. Black people have had to endure the traumas of such atrocities as chattel slavery and Jim Crow laws with no access to mental health support and with often grave consequences if one were to show that any help was needed. As a result, mental health stigma continues to plague the Black community. Participants acknowledged the importance of changing the mindset of community members about mental health and healing resources. One participant described the challenge in this way:

*There's still kind of that lack of education around mental health. I will say we have come a long way in the last few years. I feel like we're having uncomfortable conversations especially around the stigma and mental health. However, we still have some folks that are out there that don't believe that mental health is a thing and it definitely is. That's the biggest thing for me is getting mental health awareness and education out to Black and Brown bodies and letting them know that. Yes, you can have Jesus. You can have your guy and there's nothing wrong with that. I want you to pray, but pray what I'll work with it. So what I mean by that is it's okay to pray, but also what are some other healing modality that can assist you and get your mental health to a healthy place and doing that.*

Changing the mindset around mental health and healing requires funding, which was another challenge identified by participants. There is a lack of funding for mental health and healing resources for Black community members. Medical insurance does not often cover alternative and complementary therapies, such as those offered by community and cultural healers. This creates a barrier to access, which is a disservice to mental health and healing. It also is a challenge for Black therapists. Some of the therapists interviewed discussed the lack of flexibility with medical insurance in terms of what can be covered to support healing. This is a challenge for Black therapists along with the demanding workload due to the underrepresentation of Black mental health professionals. All of

these challenges lead to an insufficient network or support system for mental health and healing. This is especially apparent during times of crisis as described earlier.

### ***How should these challenges to mental health and healing in the Black community in Minnesota be addressed?***

Participants were also asked to provide some methods to address the challenges to mental health and healing. Below is a condensed list of the recommendations mentioned by participants:

- Funding for mental health care
- Education on mental health offered in churches, schools, homeless shelters, and other areas Black and Brown folks frequent
- Education for youth workers, homeless shelter staff, and doctors about the connection between substance abuse and mental health as well as how mental health is discussed/viewed in Black communities
- Financial support/resources for Black therapists as well as assistance with licenses and exams
- Opportunities for non-Westernized modes of healing and mental health resources and honoring these modes through insurance
- Community leaders and champions educating people and advocating for mental health and healing resources/opportunities
- Funding for mental health resources for smaller, culturally agile or appropriate organizations
- Efforts to rebuild trust between mental health professionals and doctors and Black communities
- Long-term and sustainable investment in mental health and healing in addition to one-time events like retreats
- Culturally competent and translated mental health materials
- Higher livable wages to address the impact of poverty on mental health

### ***How are community members currently paying for services?***

There were a variety of ways that community members discussed clients paying for mental health and healing services and resources. Most organizations mentioned that their services and resources were free and their clients did not have to pay. They were able to cover their expenses through philanthropic funding and grants from organizations like the McKnight Foundation and Grace Foundation. Some participants said that medical

assistance like Medicare and Medicaid also helped pay for services. A few of the participants expressed that their clients pay out of pocket through cash, Venmo, online portals, and sliding scale payments. Other forms of payment were private funding, membership dues, donations, and funding from churches or mosques. Some participants reported receiving funding in relationship to the pandemic or racial uprising, but that this is not a sustainable way to fund mental health services. One participant shared it in this way:

*So we have multiple ways in which that happens. We have membership dues, so our Islamic mosque and our church congregations will often pay dues, but then largely we get funding from philanthropy. And so most of it is from philanthropic folks who want to fund good things and make sure that people have the things they need. Yeah. We get funding. We don't charge people to come to our events or anything like that.*

### **What changes, if any, do you think should be made regarding mental health and healing for Black communities in Minnesota?**

Participants were asked to describe changes they believe could be made to improve mental health and healing for Black communities in Minnesota. One major change that was described by most participants was more awareness of Black mental health and healing. This could be from more awareness of existing resources to more awareness of what mental health and healing means and looks like for Black community members. Participants also highlighted the need for more Black therapists and resources for Black therapists to get licensed. This could be in the form of resources to pass their exams and receive their license. One participant mentioned how Black therapists in Minnesota are underrepresented since Black therapists are disproportionately not passing their exams compared to their white counterparts (Mina, 2022). This disparity is important to highlight and make improvements towards. One participant shared:

*They need to grandfather some of us clearly. Bad exam does not dictate how I show up as a clinician. Because I can tell you, I don't have to even talk to folks, but people that know me tell them about my ability to assist in people's healing as a clinician. It does not reflect me missing three questions on that exam.*

Another change recommended that connects to more awareness is more support and access to mental health services, resources, and information for Black communities so they know where to go when a crisis occurs. This can also include learning methods of how to respond when others are facing mental health issues. Oftentimes, a person is going through a mental health crisis, but are not getting the support they need. A participant shared:

*We should change our mind like it's okay to have the conversations cause that doesn't make you not well. When you talk about things that are hard, or have hurt, or they give you anxiety. [You] just got to get to know those parts of all the parts of ourselves and know how to deal with all the parts.  
[Just] getting the word out on how to get help for mental and who can help.*

Including a variety of healing modalities is another change participants discussed. Allowing people to have access to different healing modalities (e.g., meditation, breathing practices, and healing circles) allow for people to have flexibility in finding what works for their mental health and healing. Additionally, participants mentioned the need for more physical space for mental health and healing and also group-based mental health approaches (e.g., group therapy). In the Wisdom Conversations, participants highlighted the collective connections and support valued in Black communities that can support mental health and healing. This also includes integrating spirituality in addition to religious and cultural beliefs. Lastly, participants noted the importance of addressing and acknowledging the negative impacts of racism and white supremacy in the United States, which prevents Black communities from practicing mental health and healing practices that work for them. A participant explained it in this way:

*Well, it would be really nice if the racism stopped because that would take a load off. I'm being flippant, but I'm also being real. Everybody talked about the racial reckoning and the Twin Cities is the epicenter, and there's been some great things that have emerged, but people are really still suffering.*

*For people who want to seek therapy in a more traditional way with a therapist or a psychologist, who's there? And also I think there are more ways to access that kind of healing that might have to do with your spiritual tradition or whatever, but your insurance isn't going to pay for that even if you have insurance. And so when we think more broadly about body, mind connection and wellness and the ways that being in community can be healing, that's like the story sharing work I do, that's part of processing and healing. But there's no code on an insurance form for that, especially after racial violence and upheaval, processing together, grieving together is really healing. And our communities have been able to keep some of those traditions, whether they're through religious institutions or other gatherings, or even through music or what have you.*

## Recommendations

Based on the information presented through the literature review, quality of life indicators, and the Community Wisdom Conversations, we compiled a list of recommendations that could improve the healing justice ecosystem for Black people in the Twin Cities. These recommendations are what community members and organizations recommend as impactful changes that can be incorporated in the current ecosystem to uplift Black joy as a method to support liberation, justice, and healing for Black Minnesotans.

These recommendations have the potential to address psychological and material first aid needs in daily life and during acute crisis, specifically during incidents of violence perpetrated by the state and oppression induced trauma by the criminal justice system and its collateral consequences on the Black community.

- More opportunities for funding and support for Black therapists to take exams and maintain licensing, specific spaces for Black communities to gather, access to mental health resources, education and awareness of mental health and healing. The healing justice ecosystem can assist in this recommendation by advertising available funding and support for Black mental health professionals. In addition, it can create a grant for them to utilize when needed.
- Increase the number of Black therapists and mental health professionals through educational support
- Increase the availability and acceptability of culturally grounded mental health services
- Advocate for changes to insurance policies to include culturally grounded forms of medicine and healing such as smudging, yoga, healing circles, and sweat lodges
- Increase resources for times of crisis by creating an accessible hotline or website Black Minnesotans can utilize when needing assistance. In addition to this, the healing justice ecosystem can have a mutual aid fund as developed during the pandemic for when people need support during times of crisis.
- Develop a comprehensive list of resources for Black healing and make it widely available
- Increase accessibility and awareness of mental health resources for Black Minnesotans by ensuring resources are available in areas inhabited by Black community members. In addition to mental health resources being geographically closer, it is important to also include financial supports to make accessing these supports as convenient as possible.

- Provide more spaces and avenues for connection, Black joy, and healing, especially outside of the Twin Cities
- Educate people outside of the Black community about historical, cultural aspects of the Black Twin Cities community and how mental health and well-being are experienced in Black communities
- Advocate for safer housing/neighborhoods, more green spaces, livable wages, and policies that increase quality of life generally

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## Appendix

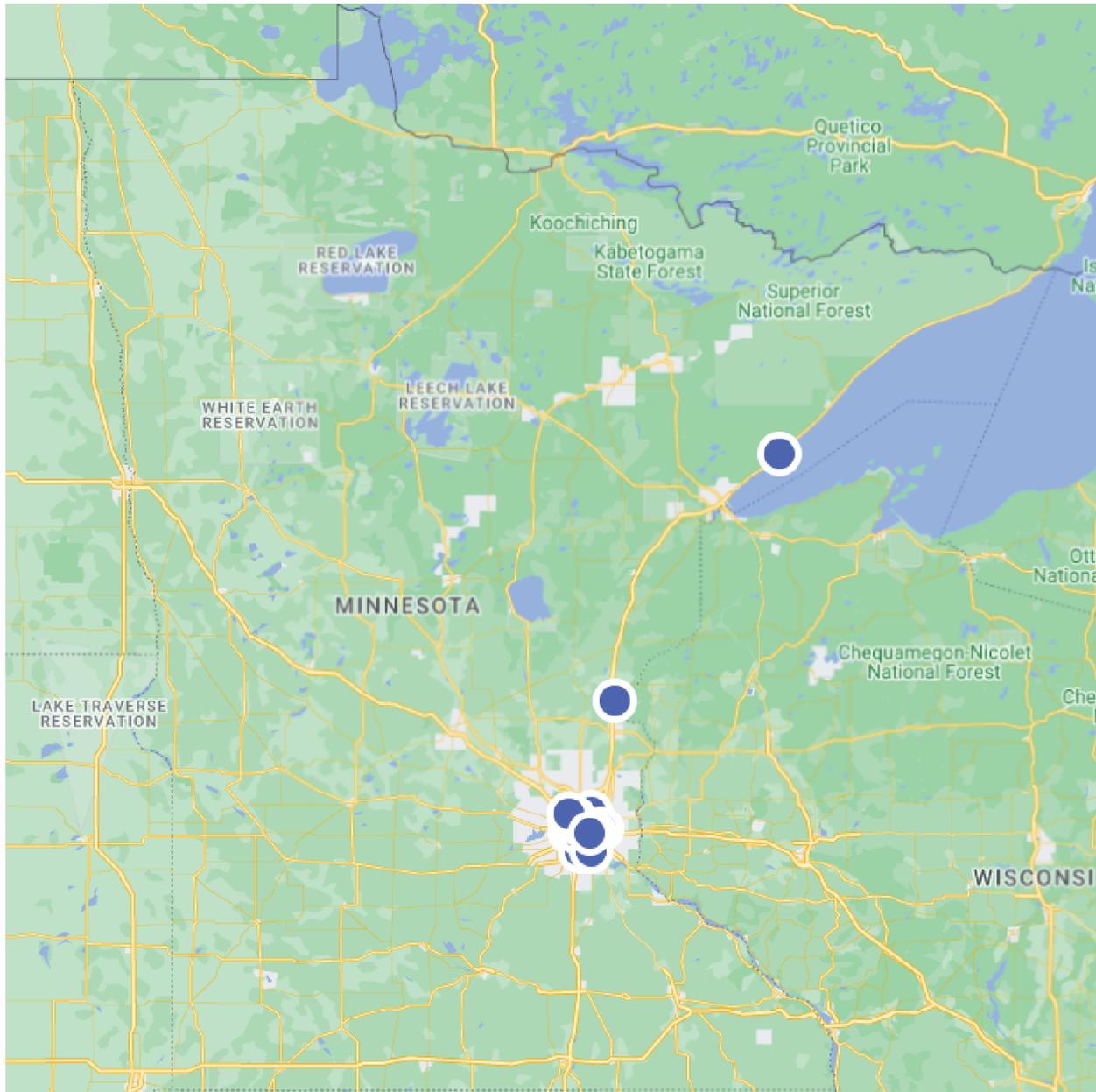
### A. National and governmental organizations and agencies reviewed

- Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective (BEAM)
- Black Men Heal
- Black Mental Health and Healing Justice Peer Support Training.
- Powerful Voices
- Healing Justice Santa Barbara.
- Legal Defense Fund.
- Alkeme Health.
- Therapy for Black Girls
- Steve Fund
- Loveland Foundation
- Black Mental Health Alliance
- Black Female Therapists
- Melanin and Mental Health
- National Black Justice Coalition
- Call BlackLine ®

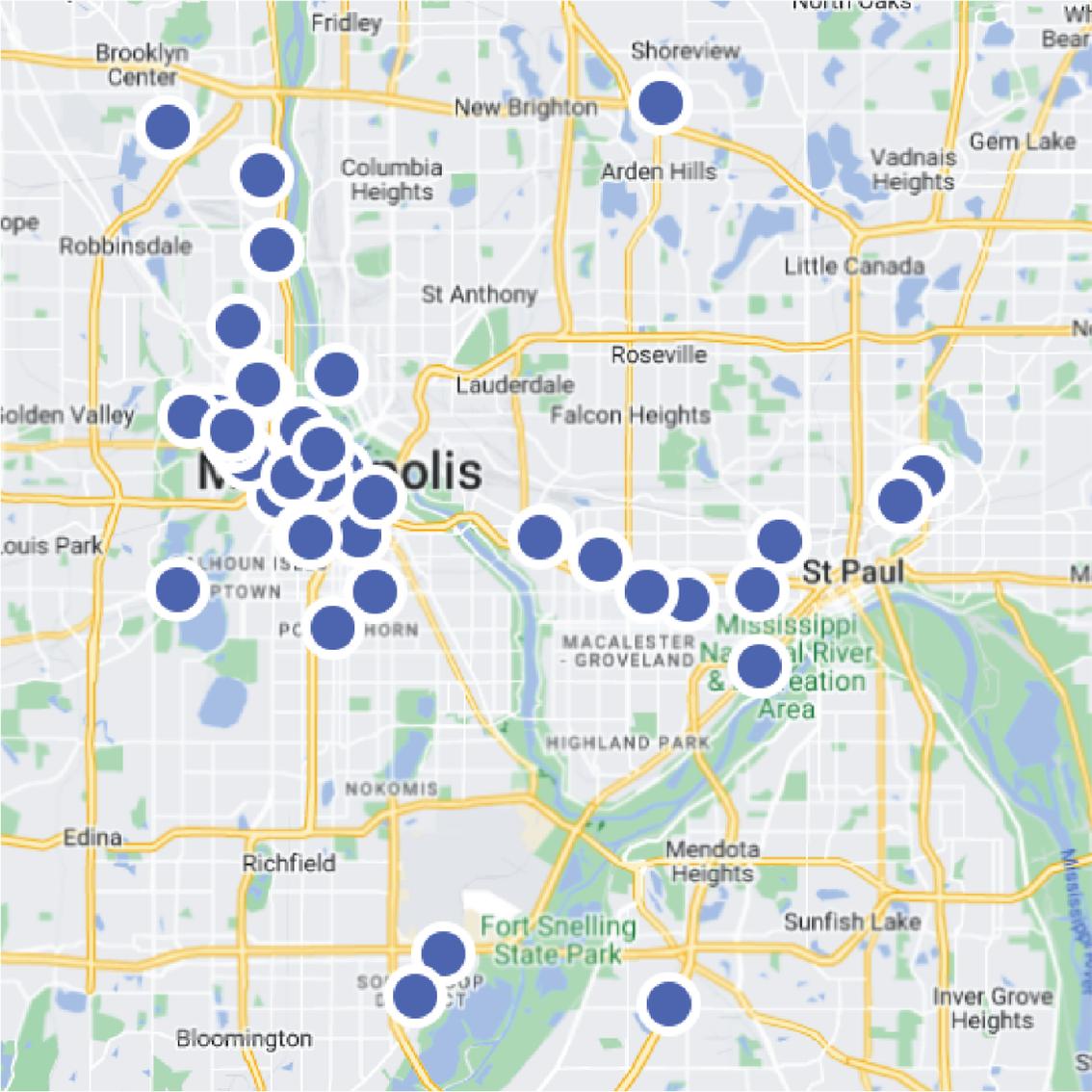
## B. Minnesotan organizations and agencies named during community wisdom conversations

- The Cultural Wellness Center
- Minnesota Healing Justice Network
- Black Youth Healing Arts Center
- Root to Crown Healing & Wellness
- Face to Face
- The Zen Bin
- Reviving Roots Therapy & Wellness
- Ubuntu Cares Services
- Stairstep Foundation
- Insight News
- Arubah Emotional Health Services
- Project for Pride in Living
- African American Leadership Forum
- Metro Transit
- Pimento Kitchen
- Nexus Community Partners
- The Improve Group
- Family Tree Clinic
- Inspire Group Coaching
- Racial Justice Initiative LLC
- Jeremiah Program
- Youth Collaboratory
- The Link MN
- Hope and Healing
- Justice Reskill
- Project Diva
- Heal Mpls
- Amani Healing Hub
- Research in Action
- Off the Blue Couch
- Wellness Collaborative
- The Healing Place
- Northside Healing Space
- Hersiliency
- Doorstep Foundation
- Ujamma Place
- Teen Focus Recovery Center
- YouthLink MN
- Chelles Kitchen and Healthy Roots Institute
- Twin Cities Men's Movement
- Twin Cities Women's Movement
- Brother EMpowered
- Free Black Dirt
- TruArtSpeaks
- Penumbra Theatre Company
- Minnesota COPE Program
- Black Community Board LLC
- Black Men Sketch podcast
- Northside Epicenter
- 612 Yoga Studio
- Maji ya Chai Land Sanctuary

### C. State map of Minnesota organizations and agencies reviewed and discussed during Community Wisdom Conversations



D. Twin Cities area map of Minnesota organizations and agencies named during community wisdom conversations



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The Healing Justice Foundation (HJF) was founded to build the infrastructure, where local, state, national, and social agencies have failed Black people. Dr. Joi Lewis created HJF to be at the intersection of mutual aid, public policy, and healing from trauma.

