

2023 Virtual Health Equity Forum

Sponsored by the Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership (MBHP)/Carelon Behavioral Health (Carelon)

Health Equity, Behavioral Health, and the Pandemic: What We Learned and How to Move Forward

Thursday, September 21, 2023

9:00 a.m. – 12 p.m.

9:00 – 9:15 a.m. Welcome and Opening Remarks

Clara Carr, *Director of Behavioral Health Equity and Recovery, MBHP*

Sharon Hanson, *Chief Executive Officer, MBHP*

Emily Bailey, *Chief of Behavioral Health, MassHealth*

Julie Hwayoung Shepherd, *Assistant Commissioner of Mental Health Services,
Department of Mental Health*

9:15 – 10:15 a.m. Keynote Presentation: Health Equity – If Not Now, Then When? If Not Us, Then Who?

Dr. Michael Curry, Esq., *President & CEO of the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers* will discuss the effect COVID-19 had on underserved communities, with a focus on their behavioral healthcare needs. The keynote presentation will include silver linings that came out of the pandemic, suggestions for how to tackle mental health and substance use issues in the aftermath, and ways to help increase access for those in minority populations. A Q&A will be included in this session.

10:15 – 10:20 a.m. Break

10:20 – 11:50 a.m. Panel Discussion: What We Learned and How to Move Forward

Maria Yerstein, MD, *Associate Medical Director of Quality at MBHP* will moderate a solution-focused panel discussion with esteemed panelists including:

Carlos F. Cappas, PsyD, MBA, *Chief Behavioral Health Officer, Lynn Community Health Center*

Dallas M. Ducar, MSN, RN, PMHNP-BC, CNL, FAAN, *Chief Executive Officer, Transhealth*

Thea James, MD, MPH, MBA, *Vice President of Mission, Associate Chief Medical Officer, and Co-Executive Director of the Health Equity Accelerator at Boston Medical Center*

Karen Suyemoto, PhD, *Professor, Department of Psychology, Asian American Studies and Critical Ethnic and Community Studies Programs, University of Massachusetts, Boston*

Brenda Vezina, CPS, LSW, *Chief Executive Officer, Kiva Centers*

A panel discussion detailing the panelists' experiences with health inequities during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, including behavioral health issues and opportunities observed through their professional work in the field and their own lived experiences.

11:50 – 12:00 p.m. Closing

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Health Equity, Behavioral Health, and the Pandemic: What We Learned and How to Move Forward

Keynote Speaker



Michael Curry, Esq. (he/him) serves as *President & CEO of the Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers*, which represents 52 health centers, serving over one million patients out of over 300 practice sites. He was named a *Bostonian of the Year* in 2021 (along with his member health centers) by *The Boston Globe* and *Boston Magazine*, one of the *Boston Business Journal's* Power 50 Movement Makers for 2022, one of Boston's Most Influential Men of Color by *Get Konnected!* for 2023, and one of this year's *Boston Magazine 150 Most Influential Bostonians*.

During the early battle with the COVID-19 pandemic, Michael was appointed by the Massachusetts Senate to the legislatively created Health Equity Task Force, which he co-chaired, aimed at addressing the health disparities that have been realized and magnified by COVID-19. He was also appointed by then Governor Charlie Baker to the COVID-19 Vaccine Working Group and served on the Department of Public Health's Health Equity Advisory Group, the City of Boston's Health Inequity Task Force, and the City of Brockton's Social Justice Task Force. He gained a reputation for always being the equity voice in the room. Over the past two years, Michael helped to convene 80 leaders of color in health, government, academia, business, and philanthropy to advocate for health equity reform in Massachusetts. In June, the Health Equity Compact (HEC), working in collaboration with the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation, released a report focused on the economic costs of racial inequities. \$5.9 billion is the annual economic burden of health inequities experienced by populations of color in Massachusetts—impacting individuals, families, as well as public and private stakeholders. The HEC also hosted the state's first Health Equity Trends Summit which featured influential leaders from government, health, business, and other diverse sectors.

In 2022, Attorney Curry was appointed Co-Chair of Massachusetts Governor-Elect Maura Healey's Safe and Healthy Communities Transition Team, as well as Co-Chair of Massachusetts Attorney General-Elect Andrea Campbell's Health Care and Fair Competition Transition Team.

He brings over 30 years of experience and results in civil rights advocacy, health reform, and health equity. He is also the Past President of the Boston Branch of the NAACP (2011-2016) and has over 25 years of dedicated service to the NAACP on the city, state-area conference, and national levels. He was elected to the NAACP Board of Directors in 2014, 2017, 2020, and recently reelected for another term by members from across the country. He serves on the National NAACP's Executive Committee, chairs of the board's Advocacy & Policy Committee since 2019 and Constitution and Bylaws Sub-Committee, and vice-chairs the Political Action and Legislation Committee. On May 15, 2021, the National Board appointed him as Administrator for the New England Area Conference of the NAACP, overseeing the state-area conference and all branches in Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Vermont.

He is leading the reorganization and strengthening of the NAACP throughout the region. Michael helped to secure the NAACP Convention in Boston this summer.

Attorney Curry is also an Adjunct Professor at both New England Law Boston teaching *Diversity and Inclusion in the Legal Profession* and Suffolk University's Moakley Center and Sawyer School of Management teaching a healthcare management and policy course.

Michael has received numerous local and national awards for leadership and advocacy and is frequently requested as a keynote speaker and panelist on a wide range of civil rights and health policy issues. In 2022, he received the Trailblazer Award from the Massachusetts Black Lawyers Association (MBLA), a Community Leadership Award from the Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action (JALSA), and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Massachusetts Non-profit Network (MNN), and recently received the 2023 Social Capital Inc's Idealist Award.

Mr. Curry is a regular commentator on the local Public Radio Broadcast/WBUR Boston, WGBH Radio, as well as on television with WHDH, WGBH, WBZ, and New England Cable News/NBC Boston, on a wide range of political, cultural, and social issues. He earned a Bachelor of Arts from Macalester College in St. Paul, Minnesota, a Juris Doctor from New England School of Law, and graduated from the inaugural class of the Executive Leadership Council's Pipeline to Leadership Program. In the spring of 2022 Michael delivered three college commencement speeches and received two honorary degrees: a Doctorate in Business Administration from Curry College and Healthcare Administration from Labouré College. In May, he received a 2023 Community Service Award from Roxbury Community College and recently received his third honorary degree from Williams James College.

Panel Discussion: What We Learned and How to Move Forward

Moderator



Maria Yerstein, MD, (she/her) Associate Medical Director of Quality, MBHP

Dr. Yerstein has an impressive track record of improving healthcare quality and reducing disparities, having led numerous initiatives at Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) and St. Elizabeth's Medical Center in Boston. A passionate advocate for health equity, Dr. Yerstein has taught numerous courses in quality improvement and contributed to projects aimed at enhancing healthcare access and outcomes for underserved populations. She has also served as a member of the American Medical Association's Center for Health Equity, where she contributed to policies and initiatives that have had a lasting impact on the industry. Her work has been recognized through numerous publications in peer-reviewed journals.

A graduate of Harvard University and the University of Massachusetts Chan Medical School, Dr. Yerstein completed her training in psychiatry at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Brigham and Women's Hospital (BWH) in Boston.

Panelists



**Carlos F. Cappas, PsyD, MBA, (he/him), Chief Behavioral Health Officer,
Lynn Community Health Center**

Carlos is the Chief Behavioral Health Officer at Lynn Community Health Center and a practicing behavioral health clinician in pediatrics. As a clinician, Dr. Cappas has helped implement behavioral health integration programs at Federally Qualified Community Health Centers and independent primary care practices. As a quality improvement

consultant, he has led multiple initiatives focused on integrated care at Boston Children's Hospital Pediatric Physicians' Organization and the Massachusetts Behavioral Health Partnership.

Carlos continues his work at Lynn Community Health Center by further developing its behavioral health services through clinical and operational integration, adoption of integrated telehealth services, and the expansion of a behavioral health workforce pipeline aimed at recruiting and retaining professionals in community-based settings. In alignment with his work in primary care and behavioral health integration, Carlos' clinical interest also centers on the impact of integrated care in enhancing access to behavioral health services for low-income populations.

Dr. Cappas is also a member of the Health Equity Compact, a statewide coalition seeking the advancement of health equity and just health outcomes in Massachusetts through transformational legislation, budget, and advocacy efforts.

A native of Puerto Rico, Carlos received his doctoral degree from Ponce Health Sciences University in Puerto Rico and is a graduate of the UMass Chan Medical School's Fellowship in Clinical Health Psychology in Primary Care. He also holds a master's degree in Business Administration from UMass Boston.



Dallas M. Ducar MSN, RN, PMHNP-BC, CNL, FAAN, (she/her) Chief Executive Officer, Transhealth

Dallas Ducar, a visionary healthcare leader, serves as the Chief Executive Officer of Transhealth, a pioneering organization committed to transforming healthcare. As a faculty member at the University of Virginia School of Nursing, Columbia University, and the MGH Institute for Health Professions, Dallas brings a wealth of expertise to her role in shaping the future of healthcare. As a Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing, Dallas actively shapes health policy related to equity, ethics, and affirming care. She demonstrates her unwavering commitment as the Co-Chair of the Primary Care Alliance, a member of the LGBTQI Federal Policy Roundtable, and a fervent advocate for affirming care across the nation.

Dallas extends her impact by serving on the Board of Directors for GLBTQ Legal Advocates and Defenders (GLAD), Healing Our Community Collaborative (HOCC), the University of Virginia Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Access (IDEA) Fund, and the Health Advisory Council for Western Governors University. Embracing her role as a public servant, Dallas is a vital member of the Northampton Board of Health and has proudly served on the Official Transition Team for Attorney General Andrea Campbell.

Dallas has helped advise local, regional, and national elected leaders in best practices and policies for gender-affirming health care, including advocating for protections for providers, and continues to push the needle of justice forward daily.

Dallas finds meaning and passion in her life by spending time hiking with her dogs, exploring the outdoors, and spending time with her loving family and friends. She is actively working to create affirming healthcare by fostering freedom, empowering patients, creating more ethical systems, and restoring a community focus back to clinical care.



Thea James MD, MPH, MBA, (she/her) *Vice President of Mission, Associate Chief Medical Officer, and Co-Executive Director of the Health Equity Accelerator at Boston Medical Center*

She is Professor of Emergency Medicine and Director of the Violence Intervention Advocacy Program at BMC. Dr. James is a founding member of the Health Alliance for Violence Intervention (the HAVI). In 2011 she was appointed to Attorney General Eric Holder's National Task Force on Children Exposed to Violence.

As Vice President of Mission, Dr. James partners with caregivers throughout BMC and coordinates BMC's relationships and strategic alliances with a wide range of local, state, and national organizations and partners, to meet the full spectrum of essentials that enables patients and communities to thrive. The intentionality is to foster a strategic ecosystem of growth, transformation, and effective models of care that are rooted in equity, economic inclusion, economic mobility, and other models of care that are essential for patients and communities to thrive.

Dr. James served on the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine 2009-2012, where she served as chair of the Licensing Committee. She is 2008 awardee of Boston Public Health Commission's Mulligan Award for public service, and a 2012 recipient of the Suffolk County District Attorney's Role Model Award. She received The Boston Business Journal Healthcare Hero award in 2012 & 2015. She was 2014 recipient of the Schwartz Center Compassionate Care Award. The Boston Chamber of Commerce awarded Dr. James with the Pinnacle Award in 2015, which honors women in business and the professions. In 2020 Dr. James received the American College of Emergency Medicine Lifetime Achievement Award. Also, in 2020, The History Project presented her with a History Maker Award. Dr. James recently received the inaugural 2020 Thea James Social Emergency Medicine Award from the American College of Emergency Physicians.

Dr. James' passion is in Public Health both domestically and globally. She was a Supervising Medical Officer on the Boston Disaster Medical Assistance Team (MA-1 DMAT), under the Department of Health and Human Services. She has deployed to post 9/11 in NYC, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans in 2005, Bam, Iran after the 2003 earthquake, and Port-Au-Prince Haiti after the earthquake of 2010. Dr. James traveled to Haiti with MA-1 DMAT one day after the 2010 earthquake. A graduate of Georgetown University School of Medicine, James trained in Emergency Medicine at Boston City Hospital, where she was a chief resident.



Karen Suyemoto, PhD, (she/they) *Professor, Department of Psychology, Asian American Studies and Critical Ethnic and Community Studies Programs, University of Massachusetts, Boston*

Dr. Suyemoto's professional activities are primarily guided by her commitment to contributing to social justice and empowering those who have been oppressed, marginalized, or silenced. Her teaching, research, and consultations focus on three interrelated areas: (a) understanding the effects of racism and oppression on mental health and identity; (b) examining experiences and effects of advocacy and resistance against racism; and (c) exploring how we may develop individually, relationally, and organizationally to resist oppression and promote anti-racism, particularly through education and in psychological practice. Her expertise as an educator has been recognized through multiple awards, including the Outstanding Teaching and Mentoring Award from the Society for Psychology Study of Social Issues, the Robert W. Goldberg Leadership in Education Award from the Society of Psychologists in Public Practice, and the Chancellor's Award for Distinguished Teaching from the University of Massachusetts, Boston. Nominated by her students and colleagues, she was recognized as a White House Champion of Change: Asian American Pacific Islander Women under the Obama administration.

Dr. Suyemoto's scholarship includes four books, more than 50 articles and chapters, and over 100 conference presentations or posters, most in collaboration with students. Her recent co-authored books *Teaching diversity relationally* and *Unraveling Assumptions: A primer for understanding oppression and privilege* (with Grace Kim and Roxanne Donovan) aim to promote conscientization and social justice action in teaching and learning for university and community members.

Dr. Suyemoto has served as the Chair of the American Psychological Association's Task Force for the Guidelines for Race and Ethnicity in Psychology, as President of the Asian American Psychological Association (AAPA), and as AAPA's delegate to the American Psychological Association Council of Representatives, where she collaborated with other Ethnic Minority Psychological Association representatives to establish and lead the Council Diversity Workgroup. She has been a faculty mentor for numerous national programs including the APA Minority Fellowship Program and she is the founder of the AAPA's Early Career Leadership Fellows Program. She is currently serving on Thema Bryant's APA Presidential Task Force for Decolonial and Liberatory Psychologies. Dr. Suyemoto is a licensed psychologist who provides consultation, training, and coaching/mentoring both locally and nationally to academic programs and mental health organizations seeking to more fully incorporate ethnocultural responsiveness and racial justice into their processes, procedures, and interventions.



Brenda Vezina, CPS, LSW, (she/her), Chief Executive Officer, Kiva Centers

Brenda Vezina is the Chief Executive Officer of Kiva Centers. Kiva Centers' mission and vision are achieved through her dynamic leadership and close community involvement. She has over 30 years of experience working within communities of people who have experienced mental health issues, substance use, and all traumatic experiences as a program creator, administrator, and direct service worker. She was a founding member of the National Campaign for Trauma-Informed Policy and Practice.

Brenda has led the United States in several federal efforts to center an understanding of community-run trauma healing in policy implementation. Brenda is a Board Member of the National Association for Rural Mental Health and an Advisory Committee Member for Brandeis University's Lurie Postdoctoral Fellowship in Disability and Health Policy, and an International Peer-run Respite Organization Consultant. She is the Executive Producer of the 2014 "Voice Award" honorable mention documentary *What Happened to You*, which speaks to the cause and effect of childhood trauma and public health. Brenda has supported the creation and implementation of peer-run organizations and Clubhouses around the world.