

Black Infant Health Program SisterStory

Jewel's Story: Focusing on the Positive

"The first time I walked in, I could be myself, and I thought, 'It's going to be okay,'" Jewel says of her first Black Infant Health (BIH) group meeting. She was pregnant, had just relocated to Sacramento from Southern California and found herself without nearby friends or family. In this culturally affirming room of women, Jewel felt supported and comfortable.

Black Infant Health (BIH) aims to improve African-American infant and maternal health using group settings and individual case management for reducing stress, increasing emotional support and building empowerment of individuals and communities. The group experience builds social support, which empowers participants to make positive life choices.

In joining her local BIH, Jewel gained not only sisterhood, but she also learned about nutrition, stress management, African-American history and accessing resources for breastfeeding, car and sleep safety, and health behavior changes. This was invaluable to Jewel, who suffered from gestational diabetes and anxiety. She connected with other BIH women, and the group became friends and remain close a year after graduating from the program.

"BIH brought me closer to a bunch of different women who were going through the same things that I was going through,

and I felt like I was not alone," Jewel says. "It taught me a lot about being empowered and knowledgeable. It's a very rewarding program. I absolutely loved it."

Kerene Tucker-Mais, Sacramento BIH group facilitator, explains that one of the best things about BIH program is "having a nonjudgmental place and people that support you."

Jewel also credits BIH with helping her focus on the positive instead of the negative, which not only helps reduce stress, but in her case, helped save her relationship with the father of her baby, who is now her husband. "I felt that the program helped me get closer to my now-husband, to be a better mom and to be a better woman because it taught me not only about empowerment, but that it's okay to lean on people for support. It's been one of the best things that ever happened to me."

Sacramento BIH Alumni: Making Connections that Count

Friendships often develop from participation in the BIH program, and feeling emotionally supported during pregnancy and beyond is one of the core tenets of BIH. In Sacramento County, a group of eight women proves that this program creates strong and lasting connections—and their friendship has continued well past their graduation from BIH.

The women socialize about once a month, sometimes with their children, sometimes without. They schedule dinners, do art activities and have special nights out, including a group favorite: karaoke. They also share a group text, and know that anytime they need support, it is just a text away.

"I feel like they are my family," says Jewel, one of the Sacramento BIH Alumni. "To meet these women who have relationship and family problems, similar issues, I didn't feel so alone. We stand by each other, and we have from the time we met. It was just like wow!"

Watch the [Sacramento BIH Alumni Friends-giving video](https://youtu.be/EbxwvjkQdOk) (<https://youtu.be/EbxwvjkQdOk>).



Jewel, second from left, with a few of her BIH Alumni friends.

Meet the Black Infant Health Program

Racism and social and economic stressors play an important role in poor birth outcomes—babies born too early and too small—for Black women.

Black Infant Health (BIH) recognizes the impact of historical racism and how long-term exposure to stress can negatively influence maternal and infant health outcomes, regardless of socioeconomic status. Within a culturally supportive environment, and honoring the unique history of African-American women, BIH aims to help women have healthy babies.

BIH implements an evidence-informed intervention that uses a group-based approach, where participants get to meet, interact and build a sisterhood with other Black women. Group sessions are complemented with participant-centered life planning, goal setting and referrals to services for participants and their families. This powerful combination serves to help women enhance life skills, learn proven strategies to reduce stress and build social support. Ultimately, this two-pronged approach impacts not only participants themselves, but future generations of Black women, infants and families.

Where We Are: Services are provided in communities where approximately 90% of African-American births occur:

Counties

- ▶ Alameda
- ▶ Contra Costa
- ▶ Fresno
- ▶ Kern
- ▶ Los Angeles
- ▶ Riverside
- ▶ Sacramento
- ▶ San Bernardino
- ▶ San Diego
- ▶ San Francisco
- ▶ San Joaquin
- ▶ Santa Clara

Cities

- ▶ Long Beach
- ▶ Pasadena

Our Goal: To improve African-American infant and maternal health, as well as decrease Black-White health inequities and social inequities for women and infants.

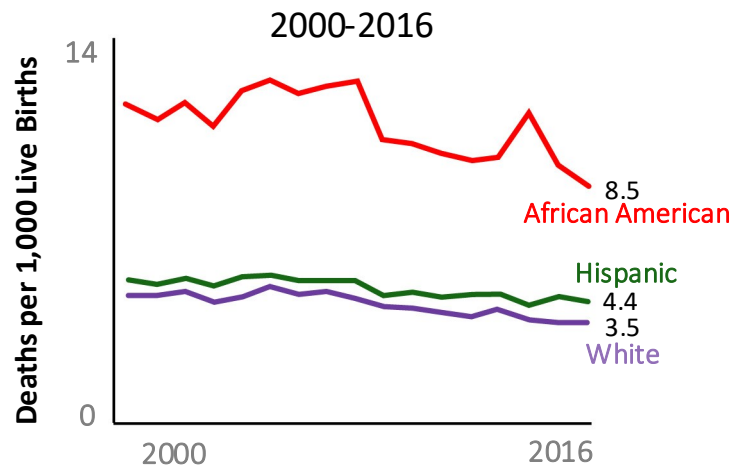
We Serve: African-American women who are 18 years or older and up to 30 weeks pregnant at the time of enrollment regardless of income.

Service Delivery: Services are free and provided by Family Health Advocates, Group Facilitators, Public Health Nurses and Social Workers.

Outcomes: Current science supports an empowerment-focused, group-based intervention as a promising strategy for improving African-American women's birth outcomes. BIH participants report:

- ▶ Stronger positive connections to their heritage and the African-American women in their community
- ▶ Increased empowerment to make behavior changes that lead to living a healthier life
- ▶ Better understanding of effective strategies to manage and reduce stress

Infant Mortality by Race/Ethnicity



Graphic chart above is a representation of surveillance data. Contact MCAHDataHelp@cdph.ca.gov for actual data.

