

DBSA Outreach to the Black Community

The Black Community's Mental Health Care Needs Must Be Served

DBSA's mission is to provide hope, help, support, and education to individuals living with mood disorders. Our core strengths include offering peer support and wellness-oriented resources and serving as the leading peer-focused advocacy organization for people living with depression and bipolar.

The Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance is committed to expanding resources to the Black community. To do so, we are working to understand our current audience, where additional outreach is needed and resource gaps exist, and how we can collaborate with organizations serving the Black community to offer support in a culturally competent manner.

The deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor brought a moment of reckoning for all of us in a narrative that isn't new and cannot be ignored. Long-standing inequities in access to mental health care have long existed: A disproportionate share of the Black community lives below the poverty line. Long-standing housing segregation has left many in health care deserts, without qualified mental health services available near their homes or places of employment. Because of profiling, Black Americans in need of mental health care services are instead arrested and incarcerated.¹ Over the past year, this existing crisis was compounded with mounting social unrest, the onset of continuing shutdowns from COVID-19, loss of employment, isolation, and fear, creating a secondary mental health crisis.

While Black Americans are 20% more likely to experience serious mental health symptoms than the general population, only one in three who need mental health care receive it.² We face many barriers as we seek to improve wellness outcomes: stigma, distrust of the healthcare system, high insurance costs, underrepresentation of Black health care providers, implicit bias, and even outright racism from medical professionals.

When providing helpful mental health services, we must develop credible and culturally competent services and resources in a most thoughtful way. DBSA recognizes the need to establish partnerships with trusted organizations to meet constituents where they are. This encompasses community-based organizations and faith leaders that often act as

¹ "Stress and Trauma Toolkit for Treating African Americans in a Changing Political and Social Environment." [The American Psychiatric Association](#).

² *Mental and Behavioral Health: African Americans*. [Health and Human Services Office of Minority Health](#).

multi-service providers, offering information while integrating health and social services into their care.³

As part of our initial plans, together with the Greater Chicago Chapter of DBSA, we are partnering with the Chicago Urban League to understand existing support networks, expand our reach, and determine how to effectively create new service networks. This includes the opportunity for community groups to both receive and be trained in the evidence-based practice of peer support.

DBSA is also launching new peer support groups, locally and nationally, specifically for Black individuals living with a mood disorder. The groups, led by a Black peer facilitator and a support specialist, will also offer one-on-one support services to group members at the end of each meeting. The Black community online groups will launch the week of April 19, meeting Tuesday evenings, 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. CT and Thursday evenings, 5:30 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. CT.

We will continue to evaluate program impact and gather feedback for expanding our footprint. Alongside this work, DBSA is taking steps to become a more representative and inclusive organization by diversifying our board of directors and staff, and ensuring our practices, content, and messaging reflect the broader audience we seek to reach and support.

³ “Double Jeopardy: COVID-19 and Behavioral Health Disparities for Black and Latino Communities in the U.S. [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#).”