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Fatherhood

This month's health focus is on Fatherhood, including harmful and untruthful stereotypes about the lack of presence of Black fathers in their children's lives. We asked **Carlos T. Carter**, President & CEO of the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh, to address the importance of dismantling these harmful falsehoods.

Carlos: There's a damaging stereotype that all Black fathers are absent or neglectful, but it's not true. Many Black fathers are deeply committed to their children and families. This belief is rooted in historical oppression and continues to fuel stereotypes.

It runs counter to research that shows when Black fathers are involved, they're more engaged than fathers from other racial groups. Labeling people this way is dangerous and perpetuates the dehumanization and criminalization of Black fathers, contributing to systemic discrimination.

Our youth need to know they and their fathers deserve dignity, respect, and love, so they can grow up to be strong, responsible fathers themselves. Challenging and dismantling the stereotype is essential for the well-being of Black families.

Q: How does the Urban League help Black fathers provide for and support their children, financially and developmentally?

Carlos: Each of our Family Support Centers has developed a Men's Support Group that encourages men to come together and discuss issues. The groups are guided by the men themselves, ensuring that discussions are relevant and reflective. While the overarching themes are similar across centers, each group tailors topics to address the specific needs of their community. Examples include the



CARLOS T. CARTER

Duquesne Group whose members come together to share a meal and discuss how they can make an impact in their community. They are also planning an event around Father's Day.

The Northview Group discusses topics like the challenges of being a single father and political engagement, including

helping people get to the polls. There are moments of deep emotion, laughter, and even debates (including who's the greatest basketball player of all time).

The common thread among all the groups is trust! These men have created a space where they can be vulnerable — something we're not often allowed to be as Black men. As these groups grow, we aim to explore what good health looks like for Black men and develop plans to help them achieve it.

The Urban League also provides parenting workshops and early childhood development resources that offer the tools and knowledge fathers and mothers need to nurture their children's growth and development from a young age.

Our Opportunity Broker Program assists parents in overcoming barriers to access jobs and training opportunities, helping them achieve economic self-sufficiency.

We offer financial education through our Moving On' UP (MOU) program. We're also investing in our young Black men through the Black Male Leadership Development Institute (BMLDI). In partnership with institutions like Slippery Rock University, Tri-State Capital, and other community mentors, we build on their strengths. Our goal is to empower these young men to become career-ready, civically engaged, and transformative community leaders.

New book celebrates how Black fathers and communities build good health, resilience, and joy together

Fathers perform a fundamental role in the healthy development of their children and families. However, the story of Black fatherhood has been shaped by systemic racism that's excluded them as fathers and partners. This removal has contributed to Black fathers' social and health disparities — and to the health and well-being of their families and communities.

In popular culture, Black fatherhood bias and stereotypes continue to appear on social media platforms, in television programs, on movie screens, and in the news. The stereotypes are disrespectful, harmful — and untrue.

According to research from blackdemographics.com, the Institute for Family Studies, and the National Responsible Fatherhood Clearinghouse, Black men are some of the most deeply and consistently engaged fathers whether they live with their children or not. In one CDC study, Black fathers were most likely to have been involved in activities with their children compared with white and Hispanic fathers.

In short, Black fathers are powerful forces for good in their children's everyday lives, guiding them emotionally and socially.

Dr. Tasha Alston, University of Pittsburgh Assistant Professor in the School of Medicine and Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Pitt's Division of General Internal Medicine, has co-edited a new book on Black fatherhood along with Brianna Lemmons (and founder of the Black Female Fatherhood Scholars Network) and Latrice Rollins of the Morehouse School of Medicine. All three editors study Black fathers and families.

The book, which draws on years of research by well-respected academics, is titled *Health, Parenting, and Community Perspectives on Black Fatherhood: Defying Stereotypes and Amplifying Strengths*. According to Dr. Alston, "The book celebrates and uplifts Black fatherhood by citing research alongside Black men's lived experiences as they challenge stereotypes and embrace their role as fathers with resilience and joy."

The book was written for people who are studying social work, public health, and education. It's also intended for researchers, healthcare providers, policymakers, and community members whose job is to support Black fathers and families. "We hope the book will be used to create programs and processes that champion Black fathers," says Dr. Alston.

The content is organized within three key areas: Fathers' mental and physical health, how they parent, and the community support that's vital for their well-being and successful parenting. The chapters concentrate on the full range of Black fatherhood, including the ongoing challenges they face as well as their resilience. Through research and essays, readers gain a better understanding of what Black fathers need to not only survive but thrive. "For example, what does it mean to co-parent when fathers live with their kids vs when they don't?" says Dr. Alston. "How can health researchers engage Black fathers as partners in research projects and in the health of mothers? What about support for Black 'girl-dads' and dads whose children are autistic? How do Black fathers form beneficial relationships with in-laws?"

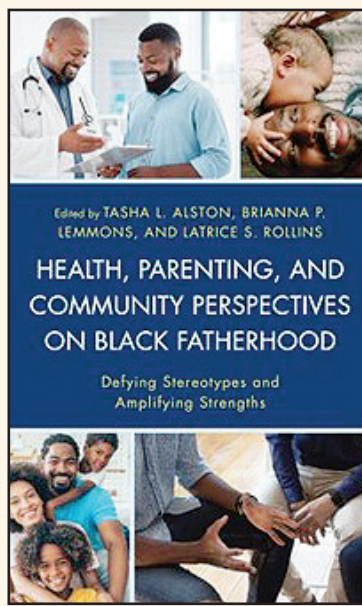
The book illustrates the relationship between the health of Black fathers and community support. "The two are deeply interconnected," says Dr. Alston. "Fatherhood and community reinforce one another, especially fathers' mental health. For example, we know that fatherhood support groups can help fathers feel less alone. By sharing their experiences with other fathers, they gain emotional support."



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Their kids do, too. "Children with healthy, engaged fathers tend to do better in school, are healthier emotionally, more resilient, and better able to cope with adversity," Dr. Alston continues.

There are economic and social advantages as well. "When communities support and elevate Black fatherhood by offering parenting classes and job training, for example, they improve household stability. That, in turn, creates a healthier neighborhood."

The interconnection between fatherhood and community support also helps to stop harmful stereotypes of Black fatherhood. "One thing I'm most proud of is that our book illustrates the persistence of Black fathers in the face of adversity — in their own words," notes Dr. Alston. "It makes clear and showcases the strengths, perspective, and contributions Black fathers make in the lives of their children, families, and communities. Their lived experiences raise the voices of Black fathers who love and care for their children in a system that often makes that difficult," she continues. "We hope their voices serve as resource for well-rounded policies and programs of support."

Fathers aren't the only ones who benefit from community support.

Fathers Collaborative Council of Western Pa. drives change for fathers and families

Fathers and their families in our region have a powerful advocate in the Fathers Collaborative Council of Western PA (FCCWPA). The FCCWPA includes organizations and agencies whose members are committed to promoting and supporting the well-being, development, and engagement of fathers and their families. The group envisions a community where all fathers are enriched, engaged, and empowered through comprehensive support and resources.

The FCCWPA's goals are

to: Foster a spirit of cooperation and mutual support among participating agencies.

Share resources, information, and best practices to improve the effectiveness and reach of fatherhood programs and initiatives and evaluate if there are additional needs.

Present a united front in advocating for policies, funding, and initiatives that support fathers and their role in family and community life, including in its own agencies.

Engage with a broader

community to raise awareness about the importance of father involvement and garner community support for initiatives.

FCCWPA values: Continuous improvement and tailored programs that offer guidance for healthy personal and family development.

Creating and sustaining holistic programs that support fathers and strengthen the family unit leading to better outcomes for everyone.

Empowering fathers through a network of knowledgeable and passionate advocates who offer resources, training, and

support. Uplighting fathers and families by leveraging the strengths and expertise of its member agencies.

Each FCCWPA organization/agency operates individual fatherhood programs that work together to uplift the fatherhood movement. That includes

fatherhood meetings, essential supplies like food and baby items, education and support groups, housing and community access, help with economic stability, and court involvement.

For more information about FCCWPA, reach out to Art Terry, Chairman, at aterry@hsipgh.org

