Expeclting Justice is excited to share with you our progress on our income supplement pilot during pregnancy for Black and Pacific Islander (PI) women in San Francisco. This project has been in the making for nearly 2 yrs, but all of our planning and preparation has allowed us to be ready to meet this unprecedented moment when racial brutality is on display both in the form of police violence and disparate COVID outcomes.

This is a moment when many Black people have lost employment and many others have substandard employment that puts them in harm’s way while barely allowing them to pay their monthly bills.

We are grateful to have the opportunity to meet this moment and honor our community with a radically anti-racist initiative, the Abundant Birth Project (ABP). None of this could have happened without our funders so thank you for being excellent partners as we advance this work forward.

**Project Focus**

In a community-academic partnership, Expecting Justice is proposing to pilot the first pregnancy income supplement program in the US, the Abundant Birth Project. We are making great progress with phase 1 we're excited to share what we've learned and our best practices and hope others can learn from what we've accomplished thus far.

**Phase 1: Research & Design**

To understand the financial experiences, needs, and barriers of Black and PI pregnant women face to achieving birth equity in SF and use this information to collaboratively design a pregnancy income supplement with impacted community members.

**Phase 2: Implement & Evaluate**

To test and put into action the work of the research phase and assess early impacts on maternal and infant outcomes resulting from providing income supplements to Black and PI women during pregnancy.
Nothing About Us, Without Us

How do we center community voices in our work?

That is the question at the heart of all of Expecting Justice’s initiatives. With the Abundant Birth Project, we are ensuring that this program is designed by and for the Black and Pacific Islander pregnant and birthing mamas that it is meant to serve. It is too often that interventions and services for marginalized communities fail because they are created without the voices and expertise of those communities. Living our mission of centering community, the Abundant Birth Project is employing several innovative strategies that will ensure authentic community inclusion:

Leaders Represent the Community

1. Expecting Justice is led by Black women that have deep personal and professional experience working in Black and PI communities.
2. We’ve recruited four Black and PI community researchers (CRs) with lived experience as mothers and birth justice workers who are deeply rooted in SF’s birthing community.

Supporting Community Expert Opinion

We’re normalizing and making it easier for those with lived experience in the community to share their wisdom and claim their decision-making power. With a protocol we call "Expert Opinion," Black and Pacific Islander community members on the Expecting Justice Steering Committee have last word and do not have to defend their position against any organizational leadership at the table.
We value the voices of the mamas we serve and we’ve invested in bringing their expertise and talents to the research table. In support of this, our community researchers are mentored by experienced researchers within ABP’s research team to strengthen their professional skills in research and program design. They also received formal training on:

- Research & Ethics
- Qualitative Data & Interviewing
- Design Thinking & Facilitation
- Data Coding & Analysis

Their roots in the community and experience in birth justice transformed and moved our research in vital ways. They’ve been critical in recruiting participants, conducting interviews, analyzing and interpreting interview data, and planning the facilitation of the design sprint which they will lead.

During analysis, the community researchers recognized a trend where many of the mamas interviewed expressed general concerns about people potentially using the income supplement for drugs or unnecessary items rather than their babies. The CRs wondered if some of these attitudes might be rooted in internalized stigma about the kinds of people who use public assistance programs, and if so, how this stigma would impact the results of the ABP design sprint. This critical input from the CRs led to the team creating a welcome video for the design sprint which discussed the impact of structural racism on physical and economic health, racial disparities in birth outcomes, and explained the purpose of public assistance programs and the origins of stereotypes that cause stigma. Check out the video at www.tinyurl.com/abpintro
The community researchers were able to conduct 21 in-depth interviews with Black and PI pregnant and parenting (pregnant within the last 5 years) mamas in San Francisco. Race equity work demands that community representatives are paid and valued for their expertise and thus interviewees were paid $75 for participating in the interviews.

The CRs expressed how good it felt to pay the mamas in their community for their time and expertise. This response highlights the importance of putting our money where our mission is and actually valuing community voice by paying community members that have been marginalized and historically left out of discussions that fully concern them.

The CRs created an environment of safety and community which allowed interview participants to openly share their experiences and provided valuable insights for the designing phase.

**Preliminary Findings:**

- Housing insecurity is a major concern for many Black and PI mamas in SF.

- While social services are usually helpful, many mamas experienced stigma from receiving them.

- Pregnant and parenting Black and PI people in SF faced significant economic challenges, arising from high costs of living and financial exclusion.

- There's a services gap for families who do not qualify for services but also struggle to meet their basic needs, given high costs of living in the Bay Area.

- Social service staff did not always represent the community they serve. PI participants noted a lack of programs centering their communities and experiences.

More than half of the participants experienced homelessness at some point in their lives. Many reported that the COVID-19 pandemic was increasing their concerns about housing.
In the US, racial disparities in adverse child health outcomes continue to persist with income inequality being one of the key contributors. With ABP, we recognize that solutions that truly aim to address racial disparities in maternal and child health outcomes must address structural racism directly as a root cause.

Early on, it was difficult to secure funding for the Abundant Birth Project because many funders were wary of giving Black and PI mothers cash without conditions or restrictions. This reaction is not uncommon or unexpected. For centuries, American politicians have pushed a narrative of Black women as “welfare queens’ taking advantage of benefits programs despite an absence of evidence proving this phenomenon.

In fact, the data from the economic policy institute shows that Black mothers on average worked more hours/year than White or Hispanic mothers. Nevertheless, many Americans hold a mental model of Black mothers as lazy and irresponsible and this narrative often serves as a justification for cutting or restricted benefits programs, programs that are critical for families trapped in low-wage employment.

To counter this form of cultural racism, ABP has been leveraging media. In May 2020, Jhumpa Bhattacharya from the Insight Center published an opinion article in Ms. Magazine featuring the Abundant Birth Project as an opportunity to challenge the racist narratives about Black mothers and other low-income parents. We are also working with a local filmmaker to create a mini-documentary that dismantles this myth. In the coming months, Expecting Justice hopes to publish more op-eds in this subject and to support our community researchers to write and publish as well.
Growing the Work for the Greater Effect

We continue to fundraise. **As of July 2020, we have raised over 2 million dollars!** We can't wait to get this support to the people who need it right now. **The Abundant Birth Project as it stands is fully funded** and if we receive more, we are prepared to expand into Alameda county right away. Because of generous contributions from Hellman we now have BARHII serving as a convener and advocate for the three Bay Area counties that are planning cash interventions. They're creating a learning community, and we'll be stronger together as we request waivers from the state.

**COVID Won't Slow Us Down**

COVID-19 has put pressure on our society that makes the need for a pregnancy cash program even more urgent, but it has also created a number of significant challenges our team has had to navigate. Some of our major challenges included, for a 3 month period, Expecting Justice lost its Physician Director Dr. Zea Malawa to emergency COVID response. Further, funding originally promised from the city had to be redirected for COVID response and the research team had to adapt quickly to an online format and new restrictions from UCSF.

In these moments, however, the bridges we built with the community truly shined. Despite the move to an online format, we've had a significant response from the community wanting to be involved in the Abundant Birth Project. **We successfully recruited and selected from 15 applicants for CR roles** and **we exceeded our goal of accomplishing 20 in-depth interviews**, which all happened over Zoom. Community and organizational collaborators are committed: **our workgroup’s engagement has not diminished at all since moving to a virtual format.** Our commitment to building meaningful and strong bridges with the community is what has allowed us to keep the work moving forward.

We’ve been able to overcome the hurdles caused by COVID 19 and stay on track through the team's commitment, flexibility, and community connections. As we move into the designing phase **we already met our goal of recruiting 15 Black and PI moms to participate in the design sprint.**
**Mothers Leading the Design**

We are continuing to support community leadership and voice by facilitating Black and PI mamas to design the income supplement pilot for themselves. In partnership with the Reflex Design Collective, we are developing ways for Black and PI moms in SF to co-create virtually in our design phase. The community researchers led 15 Black and PI pregnant and parenting moms in design thinking focus groups. The CRs used human-centered design thinking which holds the people with lived experience as the designers and considers the systemic factors impacting them. We'll be developing supplemental income prototypes from the information gained from this design sprint in the next month.

**Growing Our Team**

After the income supplement is designed we will test usability and interview key stakeholders before launching in November 2020. We'll be bringing on a Program Manager for the Abundant Birth Project as well as two Public Service Trainees who will be low-income community residents to serve as outreach workers and assist with ongoing research.

**Spreading the Word**

We have been approved to present on a panel at the 2020 American Public Health Association Annual Meeting and Expo alongside the ABP community researchers and key team members.

**Thank You!**

ABP presents an opportunity to transform San Francisco into a city where all children have a healthy start at life. Thank you for partnering with us in this work.
Research Team

Dr. Zea Malawa
Physician Director
Expecting Justice

Solaire Spellen
Program Associate
Expecting Justice

Breezy Powell
Administrative Assistant
Community Researcher
Expecting Justice

Michaela Taylor
Graduate Intern
Expecting Justice

Jazzmin Williams
Fellow
Expecting Justice

Maile Chand
Community Researcher

Anjeanette Coats
Community Researcher

Sabra Bell
Community Researcher

Dr. Deborah Karasek
Principal Investigator

Anu Manchikanti Gomez
Co-Principal Investigator

Monica De La Cruz
Graduate Student Researcher

Esperanza Castillo
UCSF Project Coordinator

Ekland Abdiwahab
Graduate Student Researcher

The ABP Team
Acknowledgments

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