



# BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE DC, Maryland, and Virginia (DMV)



## The DC-Maryland-Virginia BCR Network

The Building Community Resilience process serves as a central strategy and organizing platform to improve child health and wellness outcomes in the Washington, DC metropolitan region, including Northern Virginia and Baltimore, Maryland.

Key partners in the DMV include Martha's Table, Trinity Washington University, the Early Childhood Innovation Network, Ward 8 Health Council, ROOT (Reaching Out to Others Together), Community Wellness Ventures, Mary's Center, Smart from the Start, Inc., Safe Shores, Parent Watch, Inc. and the Sumner M. Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness at the George Washington University.

## The Community Context

Health, well-being, and economic prosperity are unevenly distributed in Washington, DC, despite its proximity to political and economic power. Across systems including healthcare, education, housing and criminal justice, inequitable outcomes result from structural racism in policies and practices and reflect a long history of exclusion, oppression, and inequity by design. The enduring legacy is readily measured in health, wealth, and social inequities for Black communities.

In the District, the median household income for white residents (\$141,650) is over three times higher than that of Black residents (\$45,072). Close to 90% of children living in poverty are Black. Healthcare centers, including several birthing hospitals in Southeast DC's Wards 7 and 8, have closed within the past few years, making it difficult for many living in these communities to access appropriate outpatient care. The accessibility of health services is also impacted by transportation, childcare needs, and insurance coverage. Consequently, Black birthing people in DC make up 90% of birth-related deaths, despite making up about half of all births in recent years. Further, while DC's Black residents make up 45% of the population, they accounted for more than half of COVID-19 cases and 75% of COVID deaths. Most deaths (60%) occurred in Wards 7 and 8.

In Ward 8 (DC's lowest-earning ward) there is one grocery store for every 85,160 residents, while in Ward 3 (DC's highest-earning ward) there is one store for every 9,336 residents. This disparity is reflected in health outcomes, as 43 percent of adults in Ward 8 have obesity, compared to 13 percent in Ward 3.

Limited access to resources, as well as to educational supports and safe neighborhood environments, impact the overall health and well-being of children and families. There is a 15.6-year difference in life expectancy at birth between Ward 3 (87.6) and Ward 8 (72.0).

## What is Building Community Resilience?

Building Community Resilience (BCR) is a national network and learning collaborative that seeks to improve the health and life outcomes of children, families, and communities. Teams in six regions across the country are using the BCR process and tools to help their communities not only 'bounce back' in the face of adversity, but bounce forward. Since 2017, BCR teams have helped build and strengthen the buffers that can prevent negative outcomes associated with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), particularly in the context of adverse community environments (ACEs)—the Pair of ACEs.

Using the BCR process and tools, teams work to align large systems with one another—such as health care, city government, and education—and also with community-based partners, including parenting support services and grassroots health advocacy. Teams also develop strategies – from implementing trauma-informed practices to data sharing and advocating for policy change – that bolster strengths, fill gaps, and ultimately build child, family, and community resilience. Teams identify community strengths and gaps, work in partnership with community not on community, develop a shared understanding of adversities and goals, and identify concrete policy asks to pursue. The teams use CCR's free and publicly available tools and resources—including the [Pair of ACEs and Resilience Trees](#), [Communications & Coalition-Building Guide](#), and [Fostering Equity Guide](#)—to implement their work.

BCR is led by the Center for Community Resilience (CCR) at the George Washington University's Milken Institute School of Public Health. CCR provides technical assistance, including strategic planning, facilitation of cross-sector information sharing, support for data and measurement, development of policy strategies, convening, and communications support.

DC's lack of statehood has also been a historical contributor to systemic oppression, disempowering the once-majority-Black city from full representation and participation in the nation's democratic process. Still, despite structural and systemic adversity, community members have many assets to draw upon, including strong family and community networks, access to high-quality, community-based services, relatively high rates of health insurance coverage, and expanded preschool options for 3 and 4-year-old children in DC and Maryland.

## **Martha's Table: Responding Holistically to Community Needs**

[Martha's Table](#) (MT) believes that every Washingtonian deserves the opportunity to thrive and has been committed to advancing a more equitable Washington, DC for more than 40 years. MT operates nationally accredited education programs, pairing healthy food access with physical and mental health services, and promoting family success by investing in family leaders. In 2020, MT partnered with CCR to conduct agenda-setting and strategic planning process that engaged more than 1,000 community members in Southeast DC to tell us — in their own words — what they need, what they hope for, and what they entrust Martha's Table to act on. Below is a sampling of the wide range of programming and services MT continued or launched in response to the community's input.

### **Food Access**

MT [offers several programs](#) to connect neighbors to fresh, healthy foods. MT's Lobby Markets operate daily and offer produce and pantry items at no cost to community members. Based in more than 50 public and charter schools, MT's Joyful Food Markets (JFM) invite students and their families to shop at no-cost for a variety of high-quality produce and dry goods. McKenna's Wagon, MT's longest-running program, operates 365 days a year under the leadership of volunteers to provide mobile meals.

### **Education**

MT [leads several programs](#) to support education across the lifespan. The Advancing Early Education Collaborative provides access to certification and degrees in early education. Participating students receive access to wraparound supports, including scholarships, transportation stipends, child care stipends, and financial coaching. MT's nationally accredited Early Childhood Education (ECE) program serves young learners from six weeks to four years old. Teachers focus on whole child development—physical, cognitive, and social-emotional—to ensure children are ready to learn in kindergarten and beyond. The Global Passport Program offers no-cost regional and experiential learning opportunities for youth ages 14 to 19.

### **Parent & Family Support**

MT's Family Visiting program provides individualized support to families in their homes and connects them to resources related to family goals, parenting, healthcare, and early childhood development. The bi-monthly Group Connection experience allows families to connect with one another and deepen their understanding of child development while participating in engaging, developmentally appropriate, parent-child activities such as story time, arts and crafts, sing-alongs, and field trips. The Children's Savings Account Program offers \$1000 to each child in the Early Childhood Education (ECE) program for future post-secondary school. Learn more about MT's [family engagement programming](#).

### **Community Investment for Economic Development**

Administered in collaboration with the Greater Washington Community Foundation, the [Community Impact Fund](#) provides [\\$10,000 grants](#) to nonprofits and grassroots organizations in Ward 8. In 2022-2023, 10 nonprofits were awarded \$10,000 each for unrestricted operations to advance their mission.

### **Mental and Emotional Well-Being**

In addition to offering individual and group therapy by licensed therapists, MT hosts education group sessions that help neighbors learn and practice [emotional wellness skills for everyday life](#).

## **Trinity Washington University: Preparing Providers to Deliver Trauma-Informed Care**

During the Fall of 2021 and Spring of 2022, Trinity Washington University collaborated with Community Wellness Ventures for a pilot project to support the professional development needs of mental health professionals. The Research Team Initiative on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Trauma at Trinity Washington University and Community Wellness Ventures, a mental health agency in Wards 7 and 8 in DC, are both active members of the DMV Building Community Resilience Collaborative.

The pilot project, funded and sponsored by Kaiser Permanente, was intended to provide culturally competent, trauma-informed approaches to meet clients' needs. A curriculum was developed to increase the levels of multicultural competency among mental health and school counseling practitioners as it relates to racial trauma, and provide healing and therapeutic techniques that have been proven to be effective in trauma intervention. It is through being a member of the DMV BCR collaborative that the research team gained a better understanding of the specific needs of underserved communities and those who serve them.

Based on the pilot project, the research team ascertained what parts of the project worked well, identified areas of improvement, and proposed an expansion of the pilot program at the grant funding level. In October of 2022, Kaiser Permanente agreed to fund the project at the grant level. The expansion of the program will include two cohorts of mental health and school counseling practitioners who are serving underserved populations in the metropolitan area with a focus on Wards 7 and 8. The program is scheduled to begin in October 2023.

## **Early Childhood Innovation Network: Engaging Families to Support Childhood Development**

The Early Childhood Innovation Network (ECIN), which focuses on families from pregnancy through young children up to age five, continues to be a critical partner to ensure adults in the caregiver role—parents, family members, educators, and health providers—have the knowledge and resources to improve outcomes for their children. Rooted in science and community voices, ECIN co-creates innovative and promising practices to support healthy physical and emotional development, and collaborates with diverse neighborhoods in Washington, DC. ECIN also impacts systems and policy, and works with DC government and agency leaders to ensure that law, policy, and financing optimally support young children and their families. For more information, visit [www.ecin.org](http://www.ecin.org) to [view their full array of work](#), [download a case study](#), and [check out a recent report](#) highlighting systemic behavioral health policy recommendations. Several of ECIN's innovations are highlighted below.

### ***Promoting Resilience and Mental Health in Educational Settings for Early Childhood***

To optimize early childhood developmental outcomes and children's readiness for school, ECIN is implementing the Promoting Resilience and Mental Health in Educational Settings for Early Childhood (PROMISE) model. This holistic model supports the well-being of early childhood educators, families, and young children. The workforce components of PROMISE offer culturally responsive well-being supports to teachers, staff, and leaders of early childhood education centers in Washington, DC. The family components of PROMISE offer multi-generational, culturally responsive services, including clinical and peer support, designed to support mental health concerns of both caregivers and children.

### ***HealthySteps Program and Expansion***

HealthySteps is an evidence-based model that provides early childhood development support to families where they are most likely to access it – the pediatric primary care office. HealthySteps DC embeds an early childhood mental health specialist and family service associate to provide point-of-care assessment, intervention, and care coordination – including for behavioral health – both during and in between well-child visits. ECIN implements an enhanced version of the national model by providing parents and caregivers with brief clinical sessions on parent mental health, child behavior, sleep hygiene, grief and loss, and positive parenting practices, as well as dedicated care coordination. ECIN is actively pursuing Medicaid coverage of all HealthySteps program components in DC.

### ***Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Certificate Programs***

ECIN is a partner in the Georgetown University's School of Continuing Studies' Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Program. The program consists of three non-credit professional certificates: [The Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Family Leadership certificate](#), the [Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation certificate](#), and the [Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health certificate](#). Each certificate targets professional clinicians, consultants, and community health workers in the field of infant mental health. Convened by faculty from around the U.S., the program is conducted virtually and available nationally.

## Trauma-Informed Cities Initiative: Baltimore

Healing City Baltimore, the National League of Cities, and CCR are developing a program to support a cohort of cities dedicated to advancing best practices in trauma-informed practice and trauma-responsive policy. The combined experience of these partners will be leveraged to facilitate implementation of evidence-based approaches such as restorative practice, development of community coalitions, and advancement of legislation to help communities address structural racism and community-based trauma. In 2020 Baltimore became the first city in the nation to legislate trauma-informed care with a focus on community-driven solutions to systemic cycles of inequity. The Baltimore Healing City model centers the voice of community with place-based practitioners to train government in trauma informed practice as well as to inform trauma-response policy aimed at breaking a cycle of race- and place-based inequities.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, leaders of American cities are grappling with solutions to address the nation's mental health crisis using a root causes approach. Our initiative envisions a cohort of leaders and communities whose efforts can provide a blueprint for addressing factors associated with mental health, substance abuse, and community violence that pushes past failed policies of 'law and order' and instead shifts efforts to addressing the systemic roots of individual and community despair and insecurity. We envision a coalition of cities that will help shape communities that are just and thriving. Through our shared commitment to learning from each other, we can demonstrate that healing from collective trauma is not only possible, but necessary.

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