

# Uplift during times of challenge: supporting our inclusive mental healthcare community through the Center for Diversity\* during the syndemic.

A Emmerich, K Canenguez, A Hayden, S Hull, Y Kim, E Long, M Lopes, S Madarasmi, B Rosemberg, E Tan, NH Trinh  
Massachusetts General Hospital Department of Psychiatry, Boston MA

## Introduction

- Shim and Starks (Feb 2021): “Syndemic = synergistic epidemics...the intersection of the COVID -19 epidemic, structural racism, and mental health inequities meets the criteria for a syndemic.”
- Lingras, Alexander, and Vrieze (2021): “The purpose of a DEI Committee within an academic medical department is to foster a psychologically safe working and learning environment...these goals are directly related to the wellness and retention of faculty, staff, and learners.”
- Salter (Oct 2020): “Many people who care about diversity and inclusion ...report feeling diversity burnout: feeling overwhelmed and exhausted from having to engage in and fight for issues of diversity and inclusion.”
- The syndemic of COVID-19 and the increased attention to antiracism and diversity following the murder of George Floyd led to diversity committees being called upon with greater frequency to educate and support their peers while themselves dealing with isolation and loss.

## References:

Lingras, K.A., Alexander, M.E. & Vrieze, D.M. *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Efforts at a Departmental Level: Building a Committee as a Vehicle for Advancing Progress*. J Clin Psychol Med Settings. 2021 Sep 16: 1-24.  
Salter N. *Leading through diversity burnout*. Lead Read Review. Ohio University Fisher College of Business. 10/28/2020  
Shim R, Starks S. *COVID-19, structural racism, and mental health inequities: Policy Implications for an Emerging Syndemic*. Psych Serv. 2021 Oct 1; 72 (10): 1193-1198

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the Massachusetts General Hospital Physicians Organization (MGPO) for their support of this work through a Frigoletto Uplift Grant.

\*Name changed to Center for Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (CDIB). February 2023

## Problem

The MGH Dept of Psychiatry Center for Diversity has existed since 1997 and is open to all members of our department. Prior to the syndemic, approx 30 dept members participated in Diversity Center activities per year. After the murder of George Floyd, membership swelled to over 70 members. Many members had never met in person (beginning in March 2020 all meetings were held virtually). In a survey taken of our members at the end of the 2020/2021 academic year we learned that many members were feeling:

- Social anxiety/stress about participating in large virtual meetings talking about diversity issues with people they had never met in person.
- Fatigue, isolation, burnout.

They hoped for:

- More small group discussion.
- More opportunities to be actively engaged in DEI initiatives/events.
- More antiracism/diversity education and leadership opportunities

## Methods

Members were invited to create small groups with funding for books and dinner.

Members were invited to plan speaker/training events for which funding was provided.

## Conclusion

**We were able to support our members' requests for connection, antiracism and diversity education, and leadership opportunities.**

“The event went really well! We had a turn out of 20+ people and hung around for an hour and a half getting to know each other and chatting 😊”

“It was a magical summer evening, one of the best I've personally enjoyed in years.”

## Results

### Social Gathering:

Outdoor in person dinner. June 2022. (40 attendees). All members were given copies of Heather McGhee's book *The Sum of Us*.

### Interest groups:

Racial justice book group. Members received copies of the books *The Vanishing Half* and *Blind Spot* and meal vouchers. (11 members)

Latino initiative book group. Members received copies of the book *Immigration, Cultural Identity and Mental Health* and meal vouchers. (6 members)

LGBTQ+ interest group. Members received copies of *Transgender and Gender Diverse Health Care: The Fenway Guide* and meal vouchers. (6 members)

Research group. Pizza event (25 attendees)

### Speaker/educational events:

We are all Gang Chen virtual speaker event. June 2022. (open to entire dept, 150 attendees)

Resilience in the Face of Doing Antiracism Work, Stephanie Pinder-Amaker MD. September 2022. (30 attendees)

Bystander in Public Spaces training, with Right to Be (formerly Hollaback) trainer, January 2023 (25 attendees)

“I wanted to thank you for sending the gift cards to our group. I can share that I used mine in Maya Sol in Somerville. A Mexican restaurant owned by Salvadoreans! I am Salvadorean.”

“Your enthusiastic response to inviting Dr. Chen helped me to feel I can be a part of a drive to inform people of what's going on... your encouragement has helped me channel my sadness into action. ”

“I wanted to share that Dr. Eugenio Rothe presented at grand rounds last week. He was invited at the recommendation of the Latino Initiatives group... we received one of the books he co-authored.”