

November 2023 Newsletter: Focus on Pregnancy & Childbirth

A Note from Our Executive Director

Dear Friends,

We are focusing this month's newsletter on pregnancy and childbirth, and especially on the [Black maternal health crisis](#). Each maternal death is a tragedy, leaving children without a mother, families and communities bereft. But the rise in preventable maternal mortality and severe morbidity (strokes, hemorrhage, cardiac events) is also an injustice. Of developed nations, the United States ranks last in maternal health, and it's only getting worse. This year, the maternal mortality rate in the United States is, shockingly, [at its highest since 1965](#). In the current crisis, Black women are three times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than white women, and it's estimated that 85% of maternal deaths are preventable.



One reason Black maternal health is in crisis is because Black people face structural racism throughout their lives, and Black birthing people also face racism in health care delivery. This racial discrimination occurs regardless of the woman's income and education level. Black birthing people's pain may be neglected and dismissed, they may be forced to have unnecessary C-sections, they may experience medical abuse during delivery, and they often lack access to respectful care in the postpartum period, when many maternal deaths occur. Further, abortion restrictions limit access to reproductive care, leading to human rights violations such as delayed treatment and even forced births, which put Black birthing people in still greater danger.

One result of the crisis in maternal mortality is that many Black women are turning to midwives and doulas to attend their births. Midwives and doulas are an important part of the solution to improve birth outcomes, but they need the legal freedom to provide excellent care for their patients, without unnecessary supervision and red tape. Our Bodies Ourselves Today will continue to fight, as we have for over 50 years, to ensure that all birthing people, especially Black birthing people, have access to the quality reproductive care that we deserve.

Onward!
Amy Agigian

Explore Our Resources

[Navigating Reproductive Care in a Post-Roe](#)

America

On June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Since then, thirteen states have instituted abortion bans, and courts have blocked abortion bans in nine other states. This podcast episode, published on January 22, 2023 in recognition of the 50th anniversary of *Roe v. Wade*, discusses the realities that both those seeking care and those providing it face in a post-*Roe* America. Kaitlyn Joshua, a community organizer at the Power Coalition for Equity and Justice, and Dr. Jennifer Lincoln, an OB-GYN, reproductive health educator, author, and Executive Director of Mayday Health, address how community organizers and medical providers have responded to abortion restrictions, discuss the consequences of abortion restrictions on pregnant people, and explain the importance of having conversations about reproductive justice with communities of faith. Joshua reflects on how abortion restrictions hindered her ability to receive medical care for a miscarriage and how abortion restrictions impact access to all forms of reproductive care, including pregnancy care.



[Read More about Post-Roe Reproductive Care](#)

Photo credits: Protest rally in Austin against anti-abortion legislation / Photo by Mirsasha

Meet Our Content Experts



Toyin Akinbuli, MBA **Pregnancy & Childbirth panel chair**

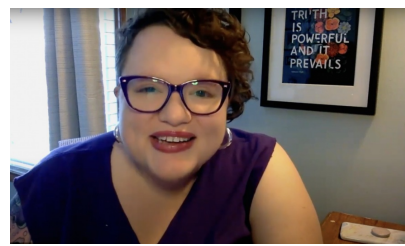
In 2005, Toyin Akinbuli's desire to engage in feminist activism pulled her back from the U.S. to her home country of Nigeria. There, she worked with pregnant women living with HIV/AIDS. Her key observation is that health equity requires both effective resource allocation and government policies that provide wraparound support. Only then can we make progress through programs, therapy, and awareness campaigns to help reduce HIV-related stigma and discrimination.

Encouraged by a doula friend to become a doula herself, today Toyin focuses on advocacy to gain recognition for doulas as essential to maternal and reproductive healthcare. "Doulas not only provide emotional and physical support to expectant individuals, improving maternal and infant outcomes," she emphasizes. "They also make access more equitable, reduce racial and other disparities, advocate for policy changes, and empower birthing people to make informed choices."

[Learn More about Toyin](#)

A Personal Story about Getting Pregnant

EH: Trying to Get Pregnant While Dealing with Violence and Fatphobia

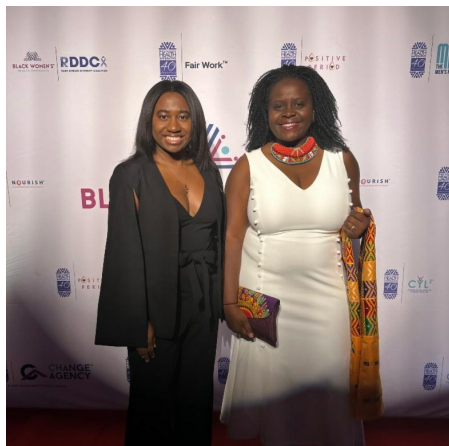


In this short video, EH shares her experience of trying to get pregnant while working at Planned Parenthood during a time when the organization was the target of violence. She begins with a discussion of managing her mental health to prepare for pregnancy and how the violence against Planned Parenthood affected her. Once she took steps to manage her mental health, she faced fatphobia in the medical field and also had to consider the financial cost of getting pregnant.

[Watch This Story](#)

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News and Updates



Our Bodies Ourselves Today at the Black Women's Health Imperative Anniversary Gala in DC

On Friday, October 13, 2023, Black women and allies gathered at the Black-owned Salamander DC Hotel to celebrate the 40th Anniversary of the Black Women's Health Imperative (BWHI). The Theme for the night was "Loving Black Women Deep in Our Souls." Among them were Jonese Austin, the Our Bodies Ourselves Today writer and content developer, and Diana Namumbemba Abwoye, a member of the Our Bodies Ourselves Board of Directors.

The evening featured remarks from BWHI Founder Bylye Avery and President Linda Goler Blount. Pastor Sarah Jakes Roberts was keynote speaker and recipient of the Vanguard Award for the partnership work among her organization for women of faith, Woman Evolve, the BWHI, and others. The long-awaited speech of the night came from Bylye Avery as she recognized the recipients of the Builders of the Movement Awards: Julia Scott, Dr. Natalia Kanem, Lula Christopher, Catherine Lampkin, MPH, Dorothy Roberts, J.D., and Brenda Shelton-Dunstion, MPH. In her remarks, Avery reflected on the current political climate and highlighted the need for a coalition of women to come together to continue to fight for reproductive rights and reproductive access.



Photo credits: Jonese Austin and Diana Namumbejja Abwoye. Jonese Austin and Diana Namumbejja Abwoye (above left); Diana Namumbejja Abwoye and Linda Goler Blount (above right).

[Read more about the BWHI's 40th Anniversary](#)

Organizing for Change

Advocating for Midwives

Our Bodies Ourselves has long advocated for midwifery care in all birth settings. You can [read more](#) about our work on this issue and the organizations we collaborate with, including the Bay State Birth Coalition and the Neighborhood Birth Center.

Birth Justice Call for Survey Participation

Are you part of the birth justice movement? Inspired by elephants, who birth in a circle of support, [Elephant Circle](#) envisions a world where all people have a circle of support for the entire perinatal period. They are currently conducting a [Birth Justice Survey](#) to help inform their work, and they would love to hear from you!



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Our Bodies Ourselves Today | 73 Tremont Street, Boston, MA 02108

[Unsubscribe aagigian@suffolk.edu](mailto:aagigian@suffolk.edu)

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Sent by contact@ourbodiesourselvestoday.org