

ACT NOW: 3rd National Conference on Black Mental Health and Wellness

Submission of Workshop Presentation



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ABSTRACT

Title: Community-Driven Black Mental Health Promotions: “Boafo ye na” Wellness ✕

Background and Objectives:

Black communities face significant mental health disparities driven by systemic barriers, cultural stigma, and limited relevant resources. Tackling these issues involves prioritizing mental health, fostering culturally appropriate dialogue, and empowering advocates with tools reflecting their lived experiences. ACOMI's "**Boafo ye na**" **Wellness model** offers a community-driven solution to these challenges.

“**Boafo ye na**” is a symbol that conveys assistance, support, patronage, cooperation, and teamwork. The philosophical significance of “Boafo ye na” is the reality of a “Willing Helper” which emphasizes providing assistance. It is a popular West African expression literally meaning “Helpers are rare”. <https://symbolikon.com/downloads/boafo-ye-na-adinkra/>

This model also focuses on prevention, capacity building, and partnerships to address mental health challenges within African, Black, and Caribbean (ABC) communities in Canada.

The ACOMI Model - Boafo ye na” Wellness in Action:

1. **Prevention Awareness Programs:** In 2020/21, ACOMI partnered with 10 grassroots groups to implement the Mental Health and Wellness Check Program, reaching over 2,200 individuals during the pandemic. Activities focused on addressing root causes like isolation and empowering families to identify and respond to early warning signs.
2. **Culturally Relevant Tools:** ACOMI adapted and disseminated the Black Mental Health Promotion Toolkit, a resource developed collaboratively by the African, Black, and Caribbean organizations in Manitoba, to promote mental health awareness across communities. <https://blackmentalhealthpromotion.ca/live-toolkit-2/>

3. **Community-Level Engagement:** Using its network of 50+ affiliates, ACOMI facilitated local discussions about mental health to normalize conversations and reduce stigma.
4. **Access to Services:** In 2024, ACOMI hosted a Community Town Hall on mental wellness, connecting community members with Black mental health practitioners and service providers.
5. **Program Integration:** “Boafo ye na” Wellness awareness is embedded into existing programs for seniors, youth, and newcomers to ensure widespread reach and impact.

Impact:

- Reached over 2,200 individuals during the pandemic through wellness checks.
- Distributed culturally relevant resources to more than 50 organizations.
- Hosted community discussions that increased awareness and normalized mental health conversations, as reflected in participant feedback.

Key Lessons Learned:

- Culturally appropriate tools must align with Black communities' lived experiences for effectiveness.
- Integrating mental health into broader wellness discussions fosters safer engagement spaces.
- A community-driven, "For Us, By Us" approach ensures sustainable mental health interventions.

Recommendations:

- **Expand Community-Led Models:** Scale the ACOMI model nationally, empowering Black communities to replicate its successes.
- **Community leadership & cultural competence:** Provide strategies for Community Leaders and Elders to support their members through dialogue, Africentric healing practices and community – based initiatives.
- **Invest in Resources:** Develop and disseminate culturally specific mental health materials tailored to Black Canadians.
- **Advocate for Policy Reform and Sustainability:** Promote policies that prioritize long term funding for Black-led mental health initiatives and programs.

Conclusion

The "**Boafo ye na**" Wellness model demonstrates the power of community-driven, culturally relevant strategies in addressing mental health disparities in Black communities. By focusing on prevention, partnerships, and capacity building, ACOMI provides a sustainable framework for mental health promotion that can be replicated globally, empowering Black communities to lead their mental health initiatives.