

How to Use this Resource

This resource is meant to spur action to incorporate the lessons learned from Latin America and the Caribbean into organizational efforts to mobilize community for health.

For more context on mobilization and health equity

To get the most out of this resource, Partners for Advancing Health Equity (P4HE Collaborative) recommends reviewing the level-setting resources provided to participants during this workshop sprint, listed in the text box below. For more background information on Latin American and Caribbean community mobilization for health see [*Approaches for Health Equity: Mobilization of Community for Health in Latin America and the Caribbean*](#).

Level Setting

New to the history of mobilization for health equity in Latin America and the Caribbean? Below are level setting resources recommended by the workshop facilitators.

Read

- › [The Language, Dance, and Music of the Garifuna](#)
- › [Combating Precariousness in Brazil's Unified Health System](#)
- › [Argentina Conducts Census of its Afro Community for the First Time](#)

Listen

- › [Garifuna Sistas Talk Spirituality Podcast Series](#)

Watch

- › [A Story About the Garifuna Documentary](#)
- › [6ª Caminhada Tembwa Ngeemba - Tempo de Paz](#)
- › [Afro-descendants and Legal Rights in Argentina: Intersectional Activism](#)

Looking for resources in Spanish or Portuguese?

- › Vea nuestro documento de enfoques en español
- › Veja nosso documento de abordagens em português

Workshop Focus

The Partners for Advancing Health Equity (P4HE Collaborative) hosted a three-series workshop sprint on Mobilization of Community for Health in Latin America and the Caribbean. Through a cultural anthropology lens, the series focused on engagement and mobilization to showcase efforts and strategies to support community engagement as a tool of public health practice.

- › **Session 1** speakers introduced the concept of engaging communities to drive health outcomes by sharing case studies on the Garifuna communities in Honduras, Nicaragua, and those living in New York City and around the world. Mirtha Colón and Alfredo González led the session.
- › **Session 2** speakers outlined how Candomblé practices in Brazil were formally recognized nationally by the Brazilian healthcare system. This outcome serves as an example of how community engagement can advance public health and equity. Sueli Conceição and Cláudia Santos Malenduka led the session.
- › **Session 3** speakers examined the history of Afro-Argentine descendants and their recognition in the census of Argentina as an example of community engagement to improve public health. Carlos Álvarez Nazareno and Lucía Dominga Molina Sandez led the session.



Moving to Action

The following sections summarize ways to use lessons from Latin America and the Caribbean to disrupt traditional research, activism, and governance approaches to improve community health.

Case Study: Addressing HIV

In 2023, the estimated prevalence [of HIV in Honduras was 0.2%](#) among 15–49 year olds. This is a noticeable decline from 2006, as [CDC and the Honduran Ministry of Health estimate](#) that during that time, 4.5% of Garifuna people in Honduras were living with HIV. [Hondurans Against AIDS](#) (HAA) was established in the early 1990s in the Bronx, New York, and plays a crucial role in community organizing for the prevention, testing, and treatment of HIV. This initiative serves as a notable example of the mobilization efforts within the Garifuna community. HAA works to prepare the community and help those who test positive, encouraging individuals to speak for themselves, be heard, and receive health care either in Honduras or New York City. The Garifuna have long struggled against racism, including in health care, and are experienced in organizing to advocate for HIV testing, treatment, and broader health care access. This mobilization is essential for addressing the health disparities faced by the Garifuna community and emphasizes the importance of community health as a determinant of individual health. The experience of the Garifuna community can serve as an instructive case for those who recognize health injustices and act in response.

Lessons from the Garifuna Advocates

- › **Respect cultural practices that support health.** Work to bridge biomedicine with traditional health practices and build relationships between practitioners. In the history of colonization in the Americas, [dominant cultures have erased cultural heritage and practices linked to health](#). These lessons from history emphasize the importance of respecting and protecting cultural practices. [Connecting biomedicine with cultural practices that support health](#) can be a step towards remediation of these cultural injustices and improve health for community members.

- › **Beware of biases.** The assumption that science is neutral can reinforce scientific racism. Scientific racism and biases directly affect health as healthcare providers may not diagnose health conditions correctly or may misinterpret symptoms, leading to unequal access to quality healthcare and exacerbated disparities. The Garifuna community practices matrilineal and matrilineal traditions, which means that the family structure centers around women. Workshop facilitators noted that western societies and scientific communities often

The Garifuna are an Afro-Indigenous community with origins in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, which were originally populated by Carib people who arrived on the islands [circa 1000 a.d.](#) For more on the history of the Garifuna people, check out our [Approaches for Health Equity](#) resource from this workshop sprint.



characterize matriarchal societies as flawed or promiscuous. When such perspectives are published in Western scientific journals, they are often presented as objective truths, despite reflecting underlying biases related to racism and sexism that are prevalent in Western culture. In the case of HIV and the Garifuna, assumptions of promiscuity due to a women-centered culture may affect how clinicians proceed with patients and affect the care they provide to people living with HIV.

- › **Be consistent and persistent.** Consistency in activism is required to make progress. It can require years of mounting pressure on elected officials to get an issue on the national agenda. Petitions, calls, and emails to officials can create traction about an issue. The passion exhibited through consistency is demonstrated through Garifuna advocates continued partnerships with organizations based in Honduras, working to advocate for HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention among Garifuna and Honduran communities.

Case Study: Recognizing Candomblé as Part of the Brazilian Healthcare System

Candomblé is a Brazilian religion with roots in the Yoruba tradition of Nigeria, which enabled people that were trafficked in the [Transatlantic Slave Trade](#) to stay connected with their ancestry. Candomblé facilitates health as it is linked with [natural healing and social support](#). Through much of Brazil's history, [Candomblé wasn't accepted](#), and so it was practiced in secret. Candomblé practitioners often identified publicly as Catholic to avoid persecution. The terreiros (sacred places of worship for Candomblé practitioners) function as health centers for traditional medicine and healing. From the Candomblé in Brazil, we can learn how other communities can foster a wide range of cultural traditions and connect people to their roots.

Lessons on Recognizing Cultural Nuance in Healthcare

- › **Incorporate traditional practices to boost community health.** Destigmatizing cultural traditions [can foster health for cultural minorities](#).
- › **Protect minority cultural beliefs.** Encouraging practitioners to share their affiliation to minority cultural beliefs can support health by connecting practitioners to other people and their heritage. Access to traditional herbs and medicines—informed by centuries of human experience with them—[may have a positive impact on health](#). Advocating for recognition and encouraging members of a marginalized group to represent themselves in the census can facilitate [pluralism](#) by improving visibility and encouraging openness and acceptance of all cultural beliefs.
- › **Organize for visibility of your community.** Work to destigmatize cultural beliefs that have been traditionally persecuted. [Community visibility of minority groups also opens the door for culturally competent treatments](#) from healthcare practitioners as previously marginalized communities become more vocal about their needs.



Case Study: The Health Impact of Recognizing African Heritage in Argentina

Recognition of African ancestry in Argentina dates back to a [1778 census](#) that found 37% of Argentines were of African descent. The last recorded measurement before 2010 showed Afro-descendants made up 30% of Buenos Aires' population in 1816. Between 1816 and 2010, Argentina stopped recording racial data in the census. In 2010, the census included a pilot question regarding African ancestry. The data collected indicated that approximately 0.5% of Argentines identified as descendants of African heritage in 2010. Because [recognition of African heritage affects a person's knowledge of their predisposition to certain health conditions](#), awareness about the prevalence of African ancestry in Argentina can have important impacts on health. There are several ways visibility can be improved in Argentina, with lessons for communities all over the world.

Lessons on Community Mobilization

- › **Advocate for visibility.** Argentine activists have been instrumental in advocating for the inclusion of the African ancestry question on the Argentine census, thereby increasing awareness and recognition of their community. Engaging with government is another crucial approach. Work within governmental frameworks to help raise awareness of indigenous and African ancestry, traditions, health, well-being, and rights. Activism and governmental work do not need to be mutually exclusive. Workshop facilitator [Carlos Álvarez Nazareno](#) [exemplifies this by working both in government and organizing outside](#) it for the rights of Afro-Argentine people.
- › **Raise awareness about health inequities.** One way to do this is by educating young people about health disparities through curricula and media. This ensures that audiences of all ages understand the importance of addressing these issues. Integrate the history of African and Indigenous peoples in Latin America and the Caribbean into academic contexts to foster a deeper understanding of their contributions and struggles. Historical narratives often overlook the complexity and truth of African descendants in the Americas, so examining primary source documents is crucial for an accurate understanding.
- › **Foster respect and understanding.** Highlight and teach the unique history and cultural significance of the Afro-Argentine people to educate broader communities. Actively engage with diverse audiences about the importance of cultural traditions and their impact on health and well-being.

› Try it out: Questions for Action

These questions can guide discussions and initiatives to ensure that the historical and cultural contexts of Afro-descendants, indigenous people, and other marginalized groups are respected and incorporated into health equity initiatives.

- › How can you integrate indigenous cultural with current medical practices in your community?



- › What steps can be taken to achieve national recognition of cultural practices as part of the health infrastructure?
- › In what ways can religious and cultural traditions, such as Candomblé in Brazil, contribute to health promotion and healthcare?
- › How can activism shape health practices?
- › What would it mean for indigenous health to be recognized at the local level?
- › What would recognizing Native American, Indigenous, and immigrants' health practices look like at the national level in the United States or another country?
- › How can we encourage religious pluralism?
- › How do we encourage acceptance of activism for minority cultural beliefs?
- › How is indigenous healthcare linked to biomedicine in your community?
- › What movements for recognition already existing your community?

