Introduction

In the fall of 2005, the Blue Cross Blue Shield of Massachusetts Foundation launched the Massachusetts Institute for Community Health Leadership (MICHL) to help build the leadership capacity of dynamic senior and middle management professionals in Massachusetts public health, and health care organizations that serve or advocate for the needs of low-income and vulnerable residents. The goal of MICHL is to help participants increase their personal impact, strengthen their effectiveness in their organization, enhance the organization's influence in the health care system, and understand effective leadership in the context of privilege, health inequities, and racial equity. Being a leader in the United States in the 21st century means understanding the impact of racism on health, health care, and public health. Health care and public health improvement strategies often target the symptoms of structural racism, without identifying the underlying assumptions and systems of oppression. Without the needed effort to see and name systems and structures that continue to incur advantage and disadvantage based on race, we continue to collude in an oppressive system that advantages White people over Black, Indigenous, and people of color. Seeing structural and institutional racism without taking action to educate, advocate, and speak up is failing to lead. MICHL aims to shine a light on these failures, while giving participants tools to talk about and address these structures.

Program Overview

The MICHL experience is designed to transform your perception of yourself as a leader, and is organized around four tracks of activity that are woven together over nine months of workshops. Some of these workshops will take place virtually but most will be held in-person and conform to the state's COVID-19 Guidelines. The four tracks are:

- Exploring the Inner Work of Leadership.
- Exploring Public Health, and the Health Care System
- Seeing Health and Health Care through the Lens of Structural and Institutional Racism
- Exploring Leadership Practices

The content and learning objectives associated with each track are described below in more detail. Content from each of these tracks will be integrated across the MICHL workshops. In light of the pandemic and racial justice movement, we conducted a needs assessment and series of focus groups with selected key health leaders from around the state to revise and update the program. The program revisions reflect what health system leaders are facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and in light of the social movement rising up from recent and historic racial injustice. Now, even more than we have in previous cohorts, we feel the stress leaders have been under and have incorporated extra care in creating a safe space to engage, explore, and develop. You will experience this in how we come together as a community, and in the time, we spend in healing and caring for self and others. You will see and feel it in how we learn to support the development of our best selves as leaders through crisis. And you will see and feel this as the faculty adjust each session in real time based on what is happening in the room or online. Our goal is to provide participants with content that is dynamic, lively, and meets the needs of this learning community in a respectful, safe, and authentic way.

Curriculum

The *Massachusetts Institute for Community Health Leadership* (MICHL) is designed to help participants develop practical, hands-on leadership capacities and skills that will enhance their personal effectiveness, both inside and outside of their organizations while addressing challenges and opportunities in today's increasingly complex public health, and health care systems. The experience is designed to build a network of colleagues from across the Commonwealth who are dedicated to addressing the health and health care needs of people who are economically, socially, ethnically, and racially marginalized. Learning about structural and institutional –isms (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.), while gaining practical knowledge to name and address them is an important part of this leadership learning experience. We use a variety of methods to explore and learn about ourselves and one another including:

- Experiential exercises
- Readings

- Journaling and self-reflection

- Discussions (in both small and large group settings)

- Affinity groups

- Peer coaching

By coming together to engage, interact, and examine assumptions, beliefs, and values, we will build a community that supports the development of all in a supportive way

Exploring the Inner Work of Leadership

"Leadership Presence" is a way of being and a practice that we cultivate in every aspect of our lives. We each make assumptions about what is permissible behavior at work, and, consciously or unconsciously, that is what is communicated outwardly. Many of the models that are held for leaders are based on White male behavior and have traditionally been less collaborative and more power based. These teach us, for example, that showing emotions and being vulnerable weakens our authority. In your time at MICHL, we provide opportunities to try other styles, notice their impact, and then apply insights to subsequent actions. When we find comfort with, and "own" our emotions, they become a very powerful tool to inform our leadership style. Leading from a place of greater self-awareness allows you more conscious choice. Practicing a more collaborative style here gives you the opportunity to become more "comfortable in your own skin," before trying on new behaviors back in the work space. MICHL provides tools for leading and managing for you to adapt to your style.

➢ **Learning Objectives**

Through this track, you will learn to:

- Practice being present by slowing down, becoming more aware your own assumptions, beliefs, and values, and connecting with your own sense of purpose.

- Bring more of your full self into the room and tap into lessons and wisdom learned from your cultural identity.

- Engage in self-reflection that yields deeper insight into self-knowledge and strategies for "getting out-of-the-box" and getting out of your own way.

- Engage in multilayered conversation that highlights skills of facilitative leaders, managing difficult conversations, and using dialogue as a pathway to transformation.

- Practice using deep listening and dialogue skills as tools to build collaboration and defuse tense or unclear situations either in a group or one-to-one.

Exploring the Health Care System

The challenges and opportunities inherent in health care take place within a context. Most of the challenges you face are characterized by layers of complexity that tend not to respond to simple or quick fixes. We take a systems-thinking approach to gain a better understanding of that complexity and how it affects your field, identifying adaptive shifts that are necessary to make significant change and address equity issues. You will strengthen your capacity to see patterns, make connections, and value ongoing inquiry.

We will explore health, public health and health care through a structural lens to deepen your understanding of power and privilege, and structural and institutional racism. There is a need for leaders with the commitment, energy, knowledge, and skills to do the difficult work of addressing and sustaining health equity issues in our systems and organizations.

➤ **Learning Objectives**

Through this track, you will learn to:

- Apply a systems-thinking approach to enrich your understanding of the health care system and strategies for creating change.
- Create your theory of how change happens, identify your role in creating that change, and clarify your organizing and influencing abilities.
- Learn power mapping and risk assessment as a leadership competency to support culture change work.

Seeing Health and Health Care through the Lens of Structural and Institutional Racism

We will examine how our systems have been designed to create disparities, and how those structural inequities are replicated during the design and implementation of new health initiatives continue to be without examination of data beyond the topline numbers. For example, as cited in a recent article in Health Affairs …, [statistics show] "infant mortality is more than twice as high in Black than White infants, but we fail to underscore that racism is a toxic prenatal stress for Black mothers at every income and educational level. [Further, people] need to be taught about redlining and discriminatory practices that have made Black populations more vulnerable to poor living conditions, limited food options, inaccessibility to walkable space, lower-paying jobs, inadequate educational opportunity, violence, economic deprivation, mass incarceration, and substandard health care."

➤ **Learning Objectives**

Through this track, you will learn to:

- Examine explicit and implicit ways White supremacy culture manifests in organizational culture and what you can do about it.
- Apply dialogue skills to feedback and accountability processes.
- Learn power mapping and risk assessment as a leadership competency to support culture change work.
- Map risk analysis.

Exploring Leadership Practices

Collaboration is more than simply bringing people together, or even bringing the right people together. It's also about creating safe and constructive environments in which all can participate and thus generate the synergy necessary for resourceful thought and action. Strong collaborative leaders know when to go beyond getting input from others and actually engaging them in the deeper work of defining problems and solutions collaboratively. Exploring how to stay present in rocky times is an ability demanded of highly effective leaders.

Many of our participants are trained as experts in specific fields and their roles frequently call on them to analyze problems and provide answers. Facilitating the thinking and work of others requires different skills and leadership capacities. We will explore a set of leadership skills for working with others—both within and beyond your organizations—to convene, catalyze, and facilitate collaborative efforts to understand and address the challenges facing you in health care.

➢ **Learning Objectives**

Through this track, you will learn to:

- Nurture the development of groups and foster a collective sense of shared responsibility for the whole, devoting conscious attention to the quality of relationships and the process of how people come together.
- Practice and understand boundaries, compassion, and self-care in leadership and dialogue.
- Recognize the difference between adaptive and technical challenges and design processes that are appropriate for addressing different types of challenges; balance the desire to find quick solutions with the need to first explore the issues more deeply.
- Utilize and model for others seven practices of Facilitative Leadership.

The MICHL Program Director, Michael McCormack, and Co-Director, Sharon Bueno Washington, are present for every session. Our visiting faculty are professionals with firsthand experience in addressing and co-creating change. Our diverse facilitators bring a richness of experience in community-based health care, public health, academia, organizational development, health equity, and experiential learning.

Throughout the MICHL experience, you will learn at least as much from one another as you learn from the faculty. You are invited--and encouraged--to enter MICHL with open minds, open hearts, and open eyes for a wonderful and unique learning journey!