

# ***AKArama Foundation Hosts Virtual Forum on COVID-19's Impact on African Americans' Mental Health***

The **AKArama Foundation Inc.** -- the charitable arm of Theta Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. -- is vigilant about issues impacting the communities it serves. Throughout this pandemic, members have been increasingly concerned about the impact COVID-19 is having on the mental health of African Americans.

**Veletta L. Bell**, president of the Foundation, observed: "The feeling of isolation that has resulted from COVID-19 has taken its toll on African Americans, especially children and the elderly. We must also deal with the fear that arises because we are dying from COVID-19 at a higher rate than other groups. Compounding the depression and its debilitating effects were the graphic and traumatic murder of George Floyd and the scourge of crime and civil unrest that resulted shortly after. The enduring reality of systemic racism and police brutality tests our mental capacity."

Bell charged the AKArama Foundation's Health Committee with the task of creating a platform where these concerns could be explained, analyzed, and processed. Led by Chairman, **Dr. Causandra McClain-Hall**, the Committee assembled a panel of experts who participated in a virtual platform. Its theme was "***Mental Wellness for All Ages During COVID-19 and Civil Unrest.***" The forum, which was open to the public, was held on July 25th. The event was also streamed live on Facebook at Theta Omega/AKArama Foundation.

Panelists shared their views, resources, "and perspectives on how to navigate this pandemic while maintaining mental balance." They also addressed the unique concerns, frustrations, and anxieties of every age group with an emphasis on those suffering from Alzheimer's Disease.

The participants came from various disciplines but share a mutual resolve to achieve mental wellness among Blacks. They included: **Phillip M. Bennett, Manager of Education and Community Volunteers – The Alzheimer's Association; Angela H. Mahome, M.D. – Child and Adolescent Psychiatry; and Chanel Hampton, MSW, LCSW – Medical Social Worker.**

The moderator was **Tracy Townsend**, Co-Ancor and Medical Correspondent at WBNS-10TV in Columbus, Ohio and member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. Those who registered were able to submit questions to the panelists.

In addition to the isolation, Bell noted that requiring everyone to wear a mask in public and practice social distancing has taken an added mental toll; explaining that these impositions have made us feel anxious, overwhelmed, and more susceptible to mental meltdowns.

The depths of the mental health crisis among Blacks are well documented by the Brookings Institution and the **Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective (BEAM).**

In explaining the purpose and hoped-for outcome of the Forum, Chairman Dr. McClain-Hall revealed, "We know people who suffer from mental health issues in silence and isolation. Many people with no history of mental health issues are now showing signs of depression due to months of quarantine. Through this virtual forum, we seek to understand how COVID-19 affects those with Alzheimer's and other conditions. We also wanted to provide ways to support our children's mental wellness during this pandemic. These are some of the concerns that were discussed."

**Kimberley I. Egonmwan**, AKArama Foundation Vice President, offered a broad assessment: "The social isolation and feelings of vulnerability that we are experiencing during this pandemic are very real. To keep the community from sinking into deeper despair, this webinar provided tools and resources that will confront these feelings. This forum peeled away the layers that our community is harboring and, hopefully, provided a sense of calm and hope."