

CHOSEN CIRCLES

HOW BLACK AMERICANS NAVIGATE HEALTH DECISION MAKING

MBOOTH:HEALTH





3 INTRODUCTION

4 CHOSEN CIRCLES

9 CHANGING DYNAMICS: ROLE OF TRADITIONAL HEALTH LEADERS

14 THE FUTURE OF BLACK AMERICAN HEALTH: A CLOSER LOOK AT BLACK MOTHERS + GEN Z

19 BRIDGING THE DISCONNECT: ADVICE FROM BLACK AMERICANS

24 MEETING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR MEANINGFUL IMPACT

INTRODUCTION

Health disparities in the United States have posed a staggering threat to historically marginalized communities for generations, and Black Americans are among the most affected. This is due in part to the long history of racism in the U.S. healthcare system that is still felt today. As a result, Black Americans are facing worsening health outcomes that don't harm just the Black community, but all of us.

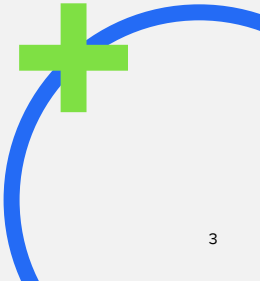
In just the past three years alone, we've seen COVID-19 have a devastating and disproportionate impact on Black Americans. The maternal death rate among Black women is unacceptably high and getting worse. Black women are three times more likely to die from pregnancy than white women. And the Black community continues to have relatively poor health outcomes across most conditions.

At the same time, Black Americans are also battling health information overload and the proliferation of misinformation. The COVID-19 pandemic helped propel health issues to the center of the national conversation. Today, health information is everywhere, and new sources of information continue to multiply – including misinformation that is specifically targeted to Black Americans, fueled in part by underlying mistrust in health institutions. In fact, research shows that this group is exposed to health misinformation more frequently than any other racial group.

In the face of these challenges, Black Americans are taking greater charge of their health. In 2021, M Booth Health's *Pharma Brandemic* study uncovered an unprecedented shift in consumers' interest, knowledge, and preference for specific pharmaceutical brands as a direct consequence of the heightened conversation around COVID-19. The study showed that Black Americans in particular feel more confident, vocal, engaged, and savvy than ever before – and many have become “super challengers,” asking their doctors more questions before agreeing to a treatment, and at times rejecting their doctor's first recommendation. In fact, our research showed that Black Americans are now the most proactive racial/ethnic group of all when it comes to managing their health.

Said simply, Black Americans have taken their health into their own hands.

This report, based on a national survey fielded in November-December 2022, provides an in-depth look at how Black Americans are navigating health information today, and identifies how health marketers and communicators can improve the way they reach and engage these important – and often neglected – health consumers.



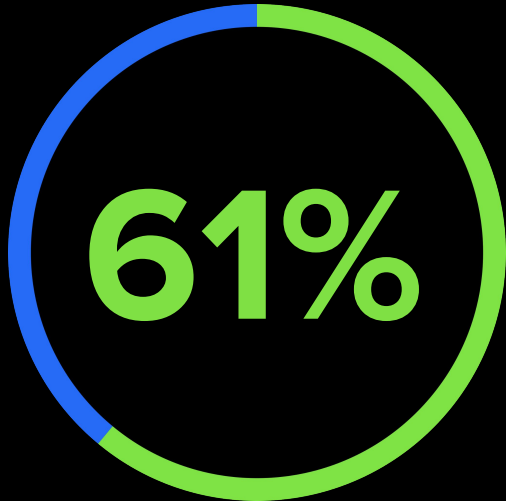
THE RESPONSE: CHOSEN CIRCLES

In the face of information overload and a healthcare system that feels pitted against them, Black Americans are creating personal networks of trusted information sources to inform their health decisions.

We call them **Chosen Circles** – a dynamic and highly curated group of trusted people and sources that one seeks advice and support from when making health decisions.



THE RISE OF CHOSEN CIRCLES



of Black Americans say they have created **personal networks of trusted people** and resources that they refer to when making decisions about their health.

THESE NETWORKS PERSIST ACROSS KEY GROUPS:

68% of Black mothers

62% of Black men

60% of Black women

59% of Black Gen Z

A CAREFULLY CURATED – AND SOMEWHAT UNEXPECTED – NETWORK OF SUPPORT

Who makes up these chosen circles? While traditional sources of health information remain important, Black Americans are also turning to far more trusted – and far less expected – groups of people.



CHOSEN CIRCLES

THE FRIENDS AND FAMILY EFFECT

44%

of Black Americans say that **family members** are a top source of health information.

28%

More than 1 in 4 (28%) cite **friends and neighbors** as a top source.



THE INFLUENCE OF INFLUENCERS

38%

More than 1 in 3 (38%) Black Americans say that **online influencers and celebrities** are important sources of health information for them.

THE THERAPIST

20%

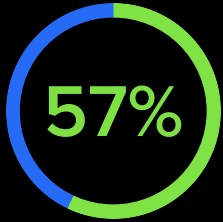
More than 20% of Black Americans say **mental health counselors and therapists** are a top source of health information – a noteworthy development given the historical stigmatization of mental health among communities of color.



CHOSEN CIRCLES

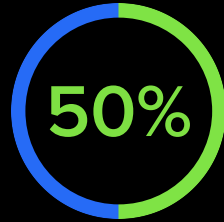
SEEKING CONFIDENCE, REPRESENTATION, + RELATABILITY

Black Americans are curating Chosen Circles to address an underlying lack of trust and inclusion.



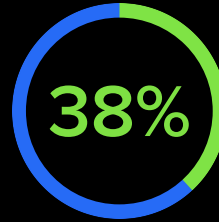
CONFIDENCE

Curating multiple sources of health information makes them feel more confident about their health decision making.



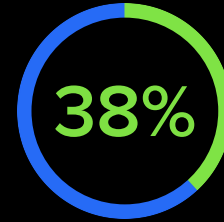
SHARED EXPERIENCES

They want to get opinions from people who have personally experienced the same health issue as them.



PEOPLE LIKE ME

They want to get opinions from people who share the same identity components as them (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.).



PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

They want to get the perspective of someone who knows them or their family history.

**CHANGING
DYNAMICS:
THE ROLE OF
TRADITIONAL
HEALTHCARE
LEADERS**

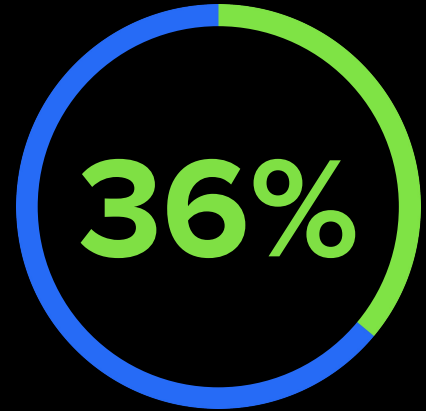


HEALTHCARE PROVIDERS ARE NOT ALWAYS IN THE CIRCLE

Decades of poor interactions with healthcare providers have contributed to the deep mistrust Black Americans have of the U.S. healthcare system.

The fractured patient-physician relationship has caused many Black Americans to look elsewhere for advice and information when making a health decision. Fewer are turning to healthcare providers for health information. **In fact, for many Black Americans, healthcare providers are not in their Chosen Circle.**

This dynamic has been shown to prevent Black Americans from getting care, and further perpetuate disproportionately poor health outcomes.



of Black Americans **do not include healthcare providers** as a top source of health information.

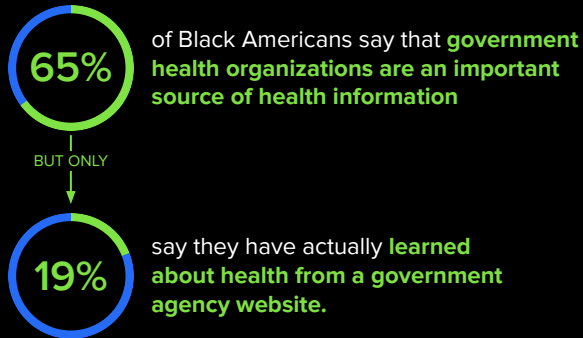
CHANGING DYNAMICS

GOVERNMENT + INDUSTRY ARE NOT BREAKING THROUGH

Many Black Americans identify government agencies and pharmaceutical companies as important sources of health information. Yet in practice, they often don't turn to them, due to a lack of either trust or inclusion.

In a sea of misinformation, reaching Black Americans with credible, medically validated information is paramount. And thus the task at hand is clear: **government and industry have a tremendous opportunity and responsibility to transform the way they communicate with and engage the Black community.**

GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS:



PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES:



CHANGING DYNAMICS

THE TRUST + INCLUSION GAP

If Black Americans see both government agencies and pharmaceutical companies as important sources of health information, why aren't they using them as resources?

Importance doesn't translate to trust, and information doesn't translate to relevance if it lacks inclusion.

**MORE THAN
1 IN 3
BLACK AMERICANS:**

- + Do not feel represented in health information
- + Do not think health organizations care about people with their background
- + Do not always trust the health information they receive

LACK OF TRUST

Black Americans say they do not believe that these entities have their best interests in mind.

GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS: 52%

PHARMACEUTICAL COMPANIES: 58%

LACK OF INCLUSION

More pointedly, respondents indicate that health information today does not feel inclusive of "people like me"

52% of Black Gen Z

46% of Black mothers

40% of Black Americans

**THE LACK OF TRUSTED
INFORMATION IS NOT
A THEORETICAL PROBLEM.**

**IT'S MAKING BLACK
AMERICANS SICK.**

**MORE THAN
1 IN 5
BLACK AMERICANS**

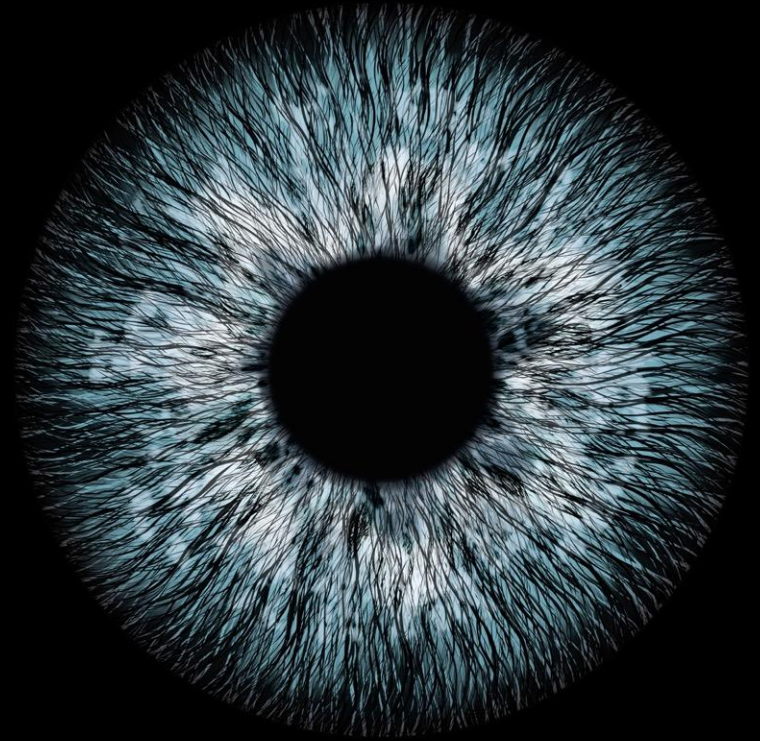
say they have **gotten sick in the last 12-18 months** because they didn't have access to health information they needed.

This translates to nearly

10 MILLION

Black Americans becoming sick each year.

**THE FUTURE
OF BLACK
AMERICAN HEALTH:
A CLOSER LOOK AT
BLACK MOTHERS
+ GEN Z**



BLACK MOTHERS: THE SUPER-ENGAGED

Black mothers face perhaps the highest stakes when it comes to health decision making. Personally, they are forced to face an unacceptably high and worsening maternal death rate, and new restrictions on abortion rights and access affect them disproportionately.

But Black mothers' role in health extends far beyond themselves. Women are often considered to be the “Chief Medical Officers” of their families. And when your family is facing systemic inequities, information that lacks relevance and resonance, and staggeringly poor medical outcomes, you have no choice but to take action.

As such, many Black mothers have taken matters into their own hands – establishing themselves as by far the most active and engaged demographic within the Black American community when it comes to advocating for their health.

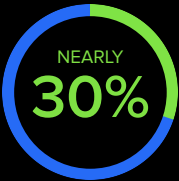


BLACK MOTHERS: THE SUPER-ENGAGED

THE STAKES ARE HIGH

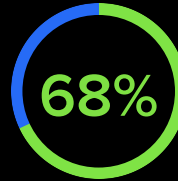
1 IN 4
BLACK MOTHERS

say they have **gotten sick in the last 12-18 months** because they didn't have access to health information they needed.
COMPARED WITH 1 IN 5 OF ALL BLACK AMERICANS

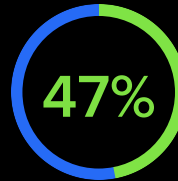


say they **ignored health information because it didn't feel inclusive** of people like them.

CHOSEN CIRCLES ARE CRITICAL



have created **personal networks of trusted people and resources** that they refer to when making decisions about their health.
VS. 61% OF BLACK AMERICANS OVERALL



seek different sources of health information because they **want to get opinions from people who share the same identity components** as them (race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.).
VS. 38% OF BLACK AMERICANS OVERALL

GEN Z: THE INFORMATION HUNTERS

Gen Z, the largest and most diverse generation in American history, actively consumes health-related information to inform their health decisions. Studies show that they are more likely than older generations to seek out and discuss health information online and to be skeptical of information from healthcare providers.

In 2021, M Booth Health's *Pharma Brandemic* study found that 49% of Gen Z had shared their opinion about healthcare news on social media in the past 12 months (compared with one-third of Americans overall) and 53% had disagreed with something a doctor had advised them on in the past 12 months (compared with 37% of Americans overall).

This trend is profound across Black Gen Z, who have become savvy "information hunters" who often turn to social media, rather than healthcare providers, for health advice.



GEN Z: THE INFORMATION HUNTERS

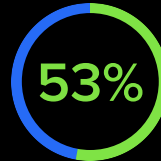
FACING THE GREATEST THREAT TO HEALTH OF ALL

1 IN 3
BLACK GEN Z

say they have **gotten sick in the last 12-18 months** because they didn't have access to health information they needed.

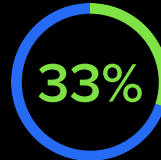
Compared with 1 in 5 of all Black Americans and 1 in 4 Black Moms

LEAST RELIANT ON HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

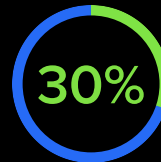


More than half of Black Gen Z **do not identify healthcare providers as a top source** of health information.

VS. 36% OF BLACK AMERICANS OVERALL



say they **made a decision about their health based on information posted by an influencer** they follow on social media.



say they **ignored health information because it didn't feel inclusive** of people like them.

BRIDGING THE DISCONNECT: ADVICE FROM BLACK AMERICANS

**HOW GOVERNMENT + INDUSTRY
CAN BETTER MEET THEIR NEEDS**



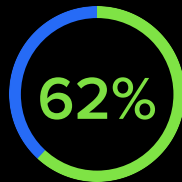
The only way to determine how to better address the significant unmet health needs of Black Americans is to ask them. So we did just that – and uncovered four core principles for more effectively reaching them with health information that will resonate and provide value.



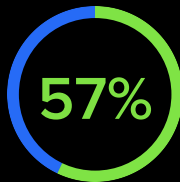
I EXPECT MORE OF YOU

Black Americans say they have greater expectations of government and industry than they do of other sources of health information. The increase in health interest and engagement has made this group more receptive to health information, but also an audience that must navigate overwhelming amounts of information from both credible and unverified sources. While most are turning to their Chosen Circles when making health decisions, they still consider government and industry to be an important source of health information. A source that they hold to a higher standard – with trustworthiness and accuracy being the #1 expectation.

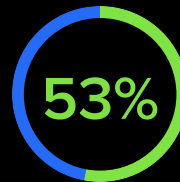
TOP THINGS BLACK AMERICANS EXPECT OF HEALTH INFORMATION FROM GOVERNMENT AND INDUSTRY:



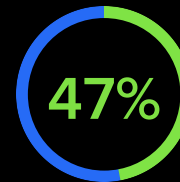
Trustworthy
and accurate



Simple and easier
to understand



Easier to access

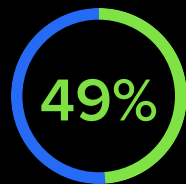


More inclusive of people
from different backgrounds,
races/ethnicities, etc.

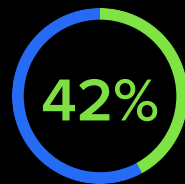


I WANT TO HEAR FROM PEOPLE LIKE ME

There is little debate that Black Americans are underrepresented in health information. Those we surveyed made it clear that any effort to more effectively meet their needs has to start here: with a commitment to delivering health information through the voices of “people like me” – real people they can relate to, that share the same experiences and backgrounds as them. That are not just communicating to the community, but are *part of* the community.



say that health information should be **delivered by people with the same background/experience** as them.



would be more likely to trust health information if it was **delivered to them by a member of their community.**



DON'T JUST SAY IT YOURSELF

The power of influencers – people who are more trusted, relevant, and active in the community – cannot be overstated. For years, consumer brands have leveraged influencers to help market products, shape opinions, and drive sales. And yet the health industry has been slow to adapt. With the emergence of tens of thousands of “health influencers” across a range of social media channels, the opportunity is ripe to deliver health information through more credible voices. But it’s also important to remember that influence is holistic. While health influencers are the obvious choice for engagement, any influencer with credibility in the Black community – whether it be fashion, food, sports, and more – should be considered to help deliver important health messages.

**MORE THAN
1 IN 3
BLACK AMERICANS**

(36%) say they would be more likely to read/watch/listen to health information if it were **delivered through influencers they follow.**

THESE DATA ARE SIGNIFICANT
ACROSS KEY GROUPS:

45% Black
Gen Z

44% Black
mothers

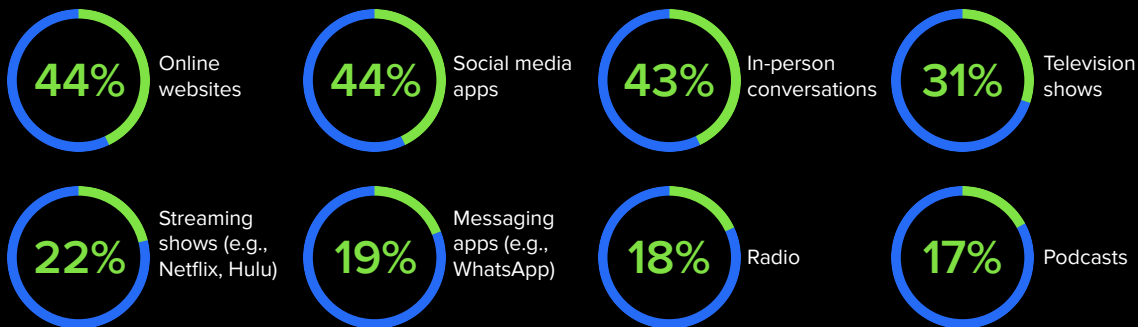
43% Black
men



MEET ME WHERE I AM

Health has gone mainstream, which means health information is everywhere. Black Americans expect health brands and organizations to deliver credible health information where they already are consuming information – social media, multicultural media, podcasts, and even messaging apps – rather than expecting them to come to you. And, most notably, in-person conversations remain critical to truly make an authentic connection.

TOP WAYS TO REACH OTHERS WITH SIMILAR BACKGROUNDS AS ME:





MEETING THE OPPORTUNITY FOR MEANINGFUL IMPACT

Health communicators and marketers have both an opportunity and an obligation to change the way they deliver health information to Black Americans. It starts with taking a community- and culture-first approach when building any health communications strategy. But it must go further, with a steadfast commitment to creating effective and custom health information – and respecting Black Americans as the dynamic and multidimensional audience they are.

INCLUSION IS AN INPUT, NOT AN OUTPUT

Of course outputs matter. A multidimensional, representative, and trustworthy piece of health information is the ultimate goal. But we'll never get there if we don't start with the inputs.

That means centering research and insights with the perspectives of historically excluded and underrepresented communities. Basing our understanding of patients on far more than the White, straight, educated, cis-gendered, able-bodied male. Considering social determinants of health and other systemic barriers to care when devising our approach.

Inclusive information can only be created by focusing intently on inclusive inputs.

Understanding the Black American experience before we get to any solution – we must be steadfast in our commitment to hearing their perspectives, going beyond the statistics, and centering ourselves on an in-depth understanding of the humanity in the Black American experience.





DIMENSIONALIZE THE AUDIENCE

The Black community is not a monolith. There is a tendency to speak to the group, when the need is for tailored strategies to address the individual needs of specific subsets of Black Americans.



Black Americans are building chosen circles in part because they want to hear from people like themselves.

Too often, communicators assume Black Americans simply want to hear from *any* other Black person. But research shows that isn't the case. They want to hear from a Black person who is similar to them – and that opens the door for a range of voices that represent what “people like me” means to an incredibly diverse, multidimensional audience within the Black community.

EMBRACE THE CHOSEN CIRCLE

To support Black Americans' health choices, communicators need to understand and engage the personal networks they turn to for information and advice.

Reaching Black Americans through healthcare providers and health experts is just one part of the equation. Trust can't be built overnight, so engaging the right messengers goes a long way.

Communicators and marketers must look for authentic, trusted messengers who share the experiences of their target audience. And we must remember that while Chosen Circles are created based on shared experiences and trust, that doesn't mean they are equipped with accurate health information.

Getting credible, medically validated information in the hands of Chosen Circles is essential to ensuring better outcomes.





MOVE AT THE SPEED OF CULTURE

Information and culture move at a rapid pace, so we can not afford to lag. Health communicators must be nimbler in our approach to maintain relevance.

The reason social media apps like TikTok and others have gained so much relevance in today's society is because their entire ecosystem is built around delivering relevant information. Algorithms are designed specifically to understand what a user wants and needs and to deliver content that meets those desires directly. It is technology that truly moves at the speed of culture.

And yet as health marketers and communicators, we rarely do. We create campaigns, batches of content, year-long strategies that don't reflect the pace of societal change.

If we're going to generate relevance on platforms built on delivering relevance, we have to change our approach.

That means adapting to misinformation in real time. Creating agile teams to respond to changing needs at the pace of those needs changing. And creating a dynamism in our messaging and activation infrastructure to move with our audience, not follow behind.

METHODOLOGY

Sprout Insight is 100% women- and minority-owned strategic consulting and market research agency with special expertise in conducting research in healthcare, health decisions and behavior. Recognizing the psychological, cultural, and societal spheres of influence simultaneously at play in individuals' lives, their methods and interpretation of findings lead to deep understanding of diverse perspectives within a cultural context.

On behalf of **M Booth Health**, a leading health communications consultancy, Sprout conducted a survey of 2,539 demographically diverse adult consumers. Respondents were representative to the U.S. Census for age, gender, race, and ethnicity, and aged 18+ between 11/30/22 and 12/11/22. The margin of error on a probability sample of this size for the study total is +/-2 percent. Margin of error by race/ethnicity group is +/-4%. For all results, statistical significance is set at the 95% confidence level.

The surveys were administered online with device-agnostic design. Sprout Insight uses a rigorous screening and data quality process, including removal of duplicate IP addresses, removing straightliners and speeders, removing pasted text, including logic checks in the survey, and manually reviewing open-ended responses



CHOSEN CIRCLES

HOW BLACK AMERICANS NAVIGATE HEALTH DECISION MAKING

TO FIND OUT HOW **CHOSEN CIRCLES** IMPACT YOUR
BRAND OR ORGANIZATION, VISIT US AT
mboothhealth.com/news-insights/chosen-circles

MBOOTH:HEALTH

