



## **Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls Highlights Eating Disorders in the Black Community in Conjunction with the EDC**

**WASHINGTON, D.C (March 21, 2024)**- Yesterday, U.S. House of Representatives Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ-12), Yvette Clarke (D-NY-09), and Robin Kelly (D-IL-02) and the [Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls](#) in conjunction with the Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy, & Action (EDC) hosted a Congressional briefing, **“Celebrating Our Bodies: How Policy Can Improve Access to Care and Treatment for Black Women & Girls with Eating Disorders”** in Washington, D.C. The briefing featured a slate of experts and individuals with lived experience who discussed the bias and stigma Black women and girls face, leaving them to struggle in silence as a result of underdiagnosis, barriers to treatment, and discrimination. A recording of the briefing can be watched [here](#).

“The EDC is thrilled to have partnered with the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls to highlight the seriousness of eating disorders in the Black community,” **said Christine Peat, PhD., EDC Board President and Director, National Center of Excellence on Eating Disorders, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.** “We know eating disorders do not discriminate, but we have so much more to learn about the unique experiences and potential risk factors faced by individuals in underrepresented communities. With input from researchers, clinicians, and advocates we can start to make a real difference to better diagnose and treat eating disorders among all who struggle—not just those who fit the stereotype.”

Representatives Watson Coleman, Clarke, and Kelly, co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls provided opening remarks.

“I’m grateful to the Eating Disorder Coalition for all their hard work to help people who suffer from eating disorders across the country,” **said Congresswoman Bonnie Watson Coleman.**

“There are many factors that contribute to the prevalence of eating disorders, especially among Black women and girls. This briefing was important for identifying these issues and working together to address them. I’m also grateful to my co-chairs, Rep. Yvette Clarke and Rep. Robin Kelly, for their work on addressing this issue, and their partnership on the Caucus on Black Women and Girls.”

“I’m proud to join my colleagues and fellow Caucus on Black Women and Girls co-chairs for this important discussion on how eating disorders impact Black women and girls,” **said Congresswoman Robin Kelly.** “It is incumbent upon us, as lawmakers, to ensure that Black women and girls have the resources they need to live happy, healthy lives.”

“It’s important for all of us to realize that eating disorders affect people of all backgrounds and body types,” **said Congresswoman Yvette Clarke**. “And it’s time we raise awareness and encourage a better understanding of how to improve access to care and treatment. This is an all too important discussion, and I’m proud to join my colleagues in the Caucus on Black Women and Girls in this critical endeavor.”

Panelists for the briefing included:

- **Dr. Amy Egbert**, Ph.D. Assistant Professor, [Psychological Sciences, University of Connecticut](#)
- **Dr. Whitney Trotter**, DNP, APRN, PMHNP-BC, RDN, Founder of [Bluff City Health](#)
- **Akiera Gilbert**, CEO, [Project HEAL](#), EDC Organizational Member
- **Christine Peat**, Ph.D., [EDC](#) Board President; Director, [National Center of Excellence on Eating Disorders](#), University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Dr. Amy Egbert kicked off the panel by discussing the link between food insecurity and eating disorders. Food insecurity is associated with higher levels of disordered eating due to (1) individuals trying to limit food intake throughout the month, then binge eating, (2) using food as a coping mechanism, and (3) eating disorder treatment ignores food insecurity.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Egbert concluded her presentation by calling the need for more funding for research to explore better treatment for Black individuals experiencing food insecurity.

“Eating disorders happen in the Black community, and it's time we start talking about it,” **said Dr. Amy Egbert, Ph.D. Assistant Professor, Psychological Sciences, University of Connecticut**. “Not having enough food to put on the table is more common in Black households than in white households, and people who don't have enough food to put on the table are more likely to have an eating disorder.”

Dr. Whitney Trotter presented a registered dietitians’ (RD) role in combating food insecurity. RDs provide information on shopping for affordable and nutritious foods, meal planning, cooking skills, and strategies for maximizing food resources. RDs also connect individuals to food assistance programs, food pantries, and government assistance programs. Dr. Trotter uplifted the Nutrition CARE Act ([H.R. 6969/S. 3010](#)), which would require Medicare Part B to cover Medical Nutrition Therapy services for individuals struggling with eating disorders. The legislation would increase access to nutrition services and address health disparities Black communities experience.

“By expanding Medicare to include coverage for Medical Nutrition Therapy as it relates to eating disorders, we can improve overall access and quality of life for those struggling,” **said Dr. Whitney Trotter**.

Following Dr. Trotter, Akiera Gilbert shared her personal experience with an eating disorder, the lack of representation in the healthcare system, and the exacerbation of isolation and inequitable treatment when seeking help. Akiera is now using her experiences in her role as CEO at Project

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<sup>1</sup> Frayn et al, 2022

HEAL. Project HEAL provides access to culturally competent clinical assessments, insurance navigation, free treatment placement, cash assistance for travel/lodging, virtual meal support, intersectional community care, and launching this year, their pilot Clinical Training Program to over 50,000 clinicians as a part of their partnership with Black Therapists Rock, to increase and diversify the pipeline of eating disorder providers.

“Our stories aren’t rare. If 80-90% of people with eating disorders never access treatment, something isn’t working – which is why Project HEAL now exists as a national leader in creating equitable access to eating disorder care,” **said Akiera Gilbert.**

Christine Peat concluded the panel discussion by highlighting the work of the SAMHSA-funded National Center of Excellence for Eating Disorders (NCEED). NCEED is a central source for aggregated, vetted, evidence-based resources, and guidance for health care providers. NCEED provides scalable, adaptable technical assistance that evolves to serve health care providers in multiple ways that align with how they practice. Since its inception, NCEED has trained over 30,000 individuals and has a social media reach of over 3 million.

The briefing concluded with a call to action for Members of Congress to co-sponsor the Nutrition CARE Act ([H.R. 6969/S. 3010](#)) and co-sign EDC’s Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations requests.

*The Eating Disorders Coalition for Research, Policy & Action (EDC) is a Washington, DC based, federal advocacy organization comprised of advocacy organizations, academics, treatment providers, family/loved ones of children with eating disorders, and people experiencing eating disorders nationwide. The EDC advances the recognition of eating disorders as a public health priority throughout the United States. Additional resources can also be found at <https://eatingdisorderscoalition.org/>.*

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