The theme of Mental Health America’s 2023 BIPOC Mental Health Campaign, developed in commemoration of Bebe Moore Campbell National Minority Mental Health Awareness Month, is Culture, Community, & Connection. Our lives are deeply intertwined with the environments around us. Who and what we are surrounded by impacts our mental health and overall wellness. In particular, Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) populations are faced with disproportionate amounts of historical trauma and displacement that have challenged how these communities remain sustainable and continue to thrive. Despite countless attempts to take away power, erase histories, and diminish future successes, BIPOC communities continue to prosper. Culture, community, and connection are pillars that support and uplift BIPOC individuals when the dangers of oppression and systemic racism threaten the environments where BIPOC individuals live, work, play, and thrive.

In many ways, BIPOC communities have had to look out for themselves and for each other in order to simply survive the systemic racism that most still face to this day. There have been numerous attempts to erase BIPOC communities through genocide, war, famine, displacement, loss of power, loss of culture, and even loss of language. Despite that, BIPOC communities have been powerful, unyielding, and revolutionary in combating these attempts to diminish their worth and value. In addition, historically, the mental health narrative around BIPOC communities has been defined by disparities, trauma, and oppression – but what could BIPOC stories and lives look like if the narrative was changed? Imagine a narrative that instead uplifted and accepted community-created systems of support as fundamental cornerstones connecting one another and providing a safe haven.

BIPOC communities throughout history have carved out systems of support in order to sustain collective well-being. These systems have centered around community and connection, deeply rooted in sustained cultural traditions, language, stories, food, art, and more. Community has been an anchor, allowing connection in a world that is seeking to ostracize and isolate. It is the power of community that has brought forth movements and social change, health and wellness, knowledge, and strength.

The cultures of BIPOC communities are born from the richness of ancestral wisdom, survival practices, and support systems that have not only sustained life but allowed it to thrive and bloom in even the most hostile of environments. BIPOC communities look out for one another and ensure survival, and in cultural hubs, BIPOC communities remind their loved ones of cultural practices that may have otherwise been forgotten.

When we reach out for help, we not only begin to heal ourselves, but we heal our communities. If trauma and displacement have been illnesses, then connection is our medicine. Connection allows us to be known and to know others. We can lean on one another. We can support each other and get support in return. We challenge each other to be better. We challenge each other to keep going.