

2025 IMPACT REPORT

BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH & REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

A Framework for the Path Forward



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LAND/ANCESTOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As we gather today, **we acknowledge with deep respect the ancestral lands of the Algonquin Anishinaabe people, along with all First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples** whose lands we are privileged to stand upon. We honor their enduring stewardship of these lands.

The Canadian Women of Colour Leadership Network (**CWCLN**), recognizes that our office is located on the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation. We express our gratitude for the opportunity to be present here today and reaffirm our commitment to working in solidarity to improve the lives of our diverse communities on this shared land. CWCLN is dedicated to the ongoing process of decolonization and fostering meaningful partnerships with Indigenous communities.

We also take a moment today, to honour, acknowledge and give thanks to our **Ancestors**. Those who came before us, stretching back through time to those proud African Queens and Kings, from whom we are all descended. We remember our roots, and all our brothers and sisters of African, Caribbean and Black heritage who laid down the path we now walk. We remember our shared heritage, we celebrate our great diversity, and we acknowledge the struggles our mothers and grandmothers overcame so that we could be present today. Today, WE are the vessel for all their hopes and dreams. May their hands be on our shoulders as we do this work.



CWCLN - WHO WE ARE

The Canadian Women of Colour Leadership Network (**CWCLN**) is committed to advancing the leadership, wellbeing, and rights of women and femmes of colour across Canada. Founded in 2018 by **Sophia Jacob**, CWCLN is founded on the four pillars of Women in Leadership, Economic Development, Community Partnerships, and Wellness.

Since 2023, **CWCLN** has been expanding its advocacy work in health and wellness to include successfully lobbying for a **Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Health Month**, creating workshops around topics of women's health and reproductive justice, and applying for funding for continued programming in the community.



HOW IT ALL BEGAN...

2023

In April 2023, **CWCLN** began a social media campaign to raise awareness around **Black maternal health and reproductive justice** and held a series of talks with black birth and health professionals.

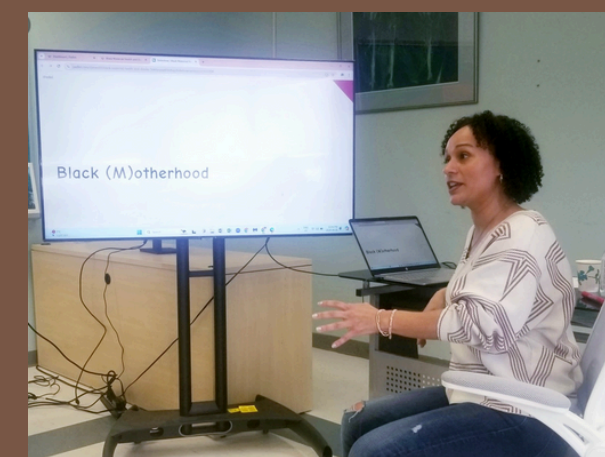
- **“A day in the Life of a Black Doula”** April 11, 2023, Instagram Live interview with Danielle James
- **“Anti-Racist Sex Ed”** April 19, 2023, Facebook Live interview with Natalya Mason and Delilah Kamuhanda
- **“In Pursuit of Reproductive Justice”** April 26, 2023, Facebook Live, panel discussion hosted by Dr. Jacklyn St. Laurent, on the systemic barriers impacting Black maternal health in Canada. Panelists emphasized the urgent need for equitable reproductive care, comprehensive sexual health education, and policies that center Black women's experiences.
- In October 2023, the **EmpowerHer** workshop series was dedicated to honouring our bodies, embracing our sexuality, and candid discussions about navigating the world in the bodies of Black women.



2024

In 2024, **CWCLN** continued to expand its work in Black maternal health and reproductive justice by heavily lobbying the City of Ottawa to have **April proclaimed Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Health Month**. We also raised awareness through social media.

- **“Equity and Economic Empowerment”** April 17, 2024, webinar with birth and postpartum doula Danielle James and Ngozi Eme and Udeme Lawrence, co-founders of MumsFirst.
- April 20, 2024 **Black Maternal Health Milestone Mapping workshop** facilitated by Zoe Jammes.
- After months of advocacy, the **City of Ottawa** proclaims April 2024, Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice Month.
- May 18, 2024 **Doula Support drop-in information session** with a Black birth and postpartum doula.



OUR PURPOSE

As CWCLN continued to expand our work, and in alignment with our **Wellness Pillar**, the Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice Working Group was formed to address the ongoing disparities and systemic barriers impacting Black women's and femmes' reproductive health. The working group is dedicated to advancing Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice through research, advocacy, and community programs.

Our goals are to:

- Establish April as Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice Month in Canada
- Advocate for inclusive maternal health care, data collection, and systemic change
- Support the health, dignity, and rights of Black women, birthing people, and families



CWCLN'S THREE PILLARS FOR ADVANCING BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH

Advocacy & Policy Change

Driving systemic reform through policy advocacy, municipal proclamations, and legislative action—grounded in community-led research and disaggregated data that reflect the realities of Black and racialized women and femmes.

Community Mobilization & Education

Raising awareness and building collective power through storytelling, peer learning, public campaigns, and culturally grounded workshops that empower Black and racialized women and femmes.

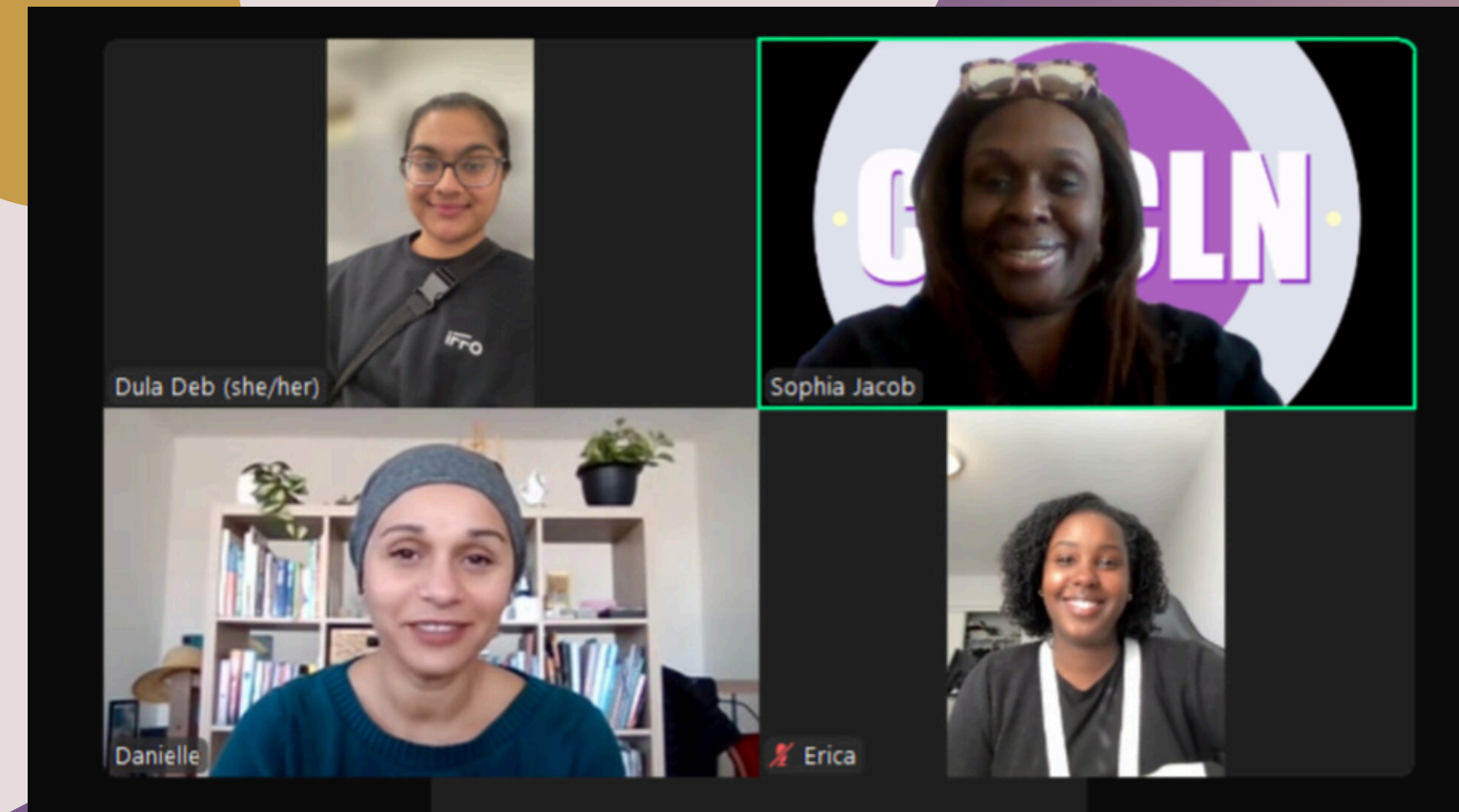
Capacity Building & Workforce Development

Strengthening the maternal health workforce by supporting Black doulas, peer educators, and community leaders through training, mentorship, and leadership development.



WORKING GROUP 2025

- We are a team of **community leaders, doulas, researchers, and policy advocates.**
- We are grounded in lived experience and systems change. We come from diverse backgrounds including public health, community advocacy, public policy and mental health.
- We are focused on **equity in reproductive justice and culturally relevant care** for Black and racialized women and families.
- We are dedicated to building relationships and establishing partnerships with other organizations and community members whose work aligns with ours.



POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE ENGAGEMENT

- Led by **CWCLN** founder, Sophia Jacob, we are committed to engaging with municipal, provincial and federal governments to ensure the voices of Black women and femmes are heard in the halls of colonial power. In 2025, CWCLN was instrumental in having **April declared Black Maternal health and Reproductive Justice Month** in Ottawa and beyond.
- Our advocacy resulted in Proclamations being issued in Cornwall, London, Kingston, Timmons and Barrie. The City of Vaughan also lit up city hall colours to show their support of Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice Month.
- **CWCLN** will continue to advocate on this issue, and Sophia Jacob has already met with MPP Lucille Collard to explore a new Members Bill that addresses the health disparities and lack of research on Black maternal health and reproductive justice. We have plans to connect with the federal government to have April permanently declared Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice Month across Canada.

OUR GOAL:

Secure a federal motion declaring April as Black Maternal Health Month across Canada in perpetuity.



THE PROCLAMATIONS



Across the region, cities are standing in solidarity by recognizing Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice Month. Five cities gave proclamations: Ottawa, Barrie, Timmins, Cornwall and Kingston. As well as the City of Vaughan lit up their City Hall in purple, gold and black in honour of Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice.



RESEARCH AND THE DATA GAP

- Our academic researcher Dula Deb from the University of Ottawa, performed an environmental scan and literature review to identify gaps in Canadian maternal health data. Since Canada lacks disaggregated race-based data, **CWCLN** has been looking at US and UK research in order to better understand the disparities faced by **Canadian women of colour**.
- With over 46 citations compiled from the U.S. the U.K. and other global sources, data suggests that **health disparities impact Black women at every stage of their reproductive lives** and well into menopause. Our research helps inform our advocacy and allows us

OUR GOAL:

Identify gaps/lack of disaggregated race data and lobby for more/better collection of relevant race data pertaining to the health of Black and racialized women and femmes.



EMPOWERING MATERNAL HEALTH: TACKLING POSTPARTUM CHALLENGES AND ADVANCING EQUITABLE CARE

Kimberley Okafor is a dedicated researcher and advocate for maternal health equity, currently pursuing a Master of Science in Management (MScM) at Toronto Metropolitan University.

As Vice-President External for her MScM cohort and an active member of the Black Researchers Initiative to **Empower (BRITE)**, she is committed to addressing systemic challenges in maternal care globally.

Her research explores the intersection of **maternal health and social inequities**, aiming to transform healthcare systems and promote culturally competent, equitable care. Through her work, she strives to influence policies that drive meaningful change in maternal healthcare.



Guest speaker



KEY THEMES

Understanding Postpartum Depression

Postpartum depression is a serious mental health condition that includes symptoms such as persistent sadness, anxiety, fatigue, and difficulty bonding with one's baby. While it can affect all mothers, research shows that Black mothers are more frequently impacted due to a range of social and structural factors.

Health Disparities and Data Gaps

In the United States, Black women face significantly worse maternal health outcomes compared to other groups. Although Canadian data is limited, similar disparities likely exist. The lack of comprehensive race-based health data makes it difficult to fully understand and address these issues in Canada.

Socioeconomic and Structural Factors

Mothers with lower income levels are more likely to experience postpartum depression. For Black mothers, these challenges are often intensified by systemic bias, barriers to accessing healthcare, and negative experiences within the healthcare system.

Adverse Pregnancy Outcomes

Black mothers are more likely to experience complications during pregnancy and childbirth, such as preterm delivery or high blood pressure. These outcomes increase the risk of developing postpartum depression.

Need for Culturally Competent and Inclusive Care

The presentation emphasized the importance of providing care that is culturally respectful and responsive to the lived experiences of diverse communities. Healthcare providers must be trained to recognize and address systemic bias in order to build trust and improve outcomes for all mothers.



RECOMMENDATIONS AND ACTION POINTS

- **Collect Race-Based Health Data:**

Better data is needed to identify and address maternal health disparities in Canada. This includes specifically gathering information on race and ethnicity to understand and improve outcomes for diverse communities.

- **Expand Access to Community-Based Care**

Early intervention and culturally safe mental health services at the community level may reduce the severity of postpartum depression and help mothers receive support before crises arise.

CONCLUSION

Black mothers face multiple barriers that increase their risk for postpartum depression. These include adverse pregnancy experiences, systemic bias, and limited access to appropriate care. Addressing these disparities is essential to advancing maternal health equity and ensuring that all mothers are supported during and after pregnancy.

If you'd like to learn more about the presentation "*Empowering Maternal Health: Tackling Postpartum Challenges and Advancing Equitable Care*", please reach out to Kimberley via email or connect with her on LinkedIn.

✉ kimberley1036@gmail.com

in [Kimberley Okafor](#)



HEALTH SECTOR PARTNERSHIPS

- Erica Kamikazi is a Community Engagement Coordinator working in Community Engagement with Ottawa Public Health. Erica's work with **CWCLN** has focused on reproductive health and chronic illnesses like diabetes and heart disease. Cervical cancer education is another area CWCLN plans to focus on, likely through online workshops and webinars.
- In partnership with the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, CWCLN is planning a series of workshops on the intersection of STBBIs and maternal health. Erica has also connected us with Ottawa Public Health programs that align with **our goals to support Black and racialized women and femmes**. Ontario Health has also committed to providing facilitation support for CWCLN workshops.

OUR GOAL:

Hold a variety of workshops and webinars on women's reproductive health for the ACB community, and develop more partnerships within the health care sector.



DOULA AND PEER SUPPORT

- Under CWCLN's pillars of **Wellness and Economic Empowerment**, seeks to increase the number of Black and racialized doulas in Ottawa and across the country. Research has shown that doula support for Black and racialized women and parents can have a positive impact on their birthing experiences and help parents deal with challenges in the postpartum period. Danielle James is a birth and postpartum doula, and the Engagement and Learning Coordinator for Black maternal health and reproductive justice at **CWCLN**.
- Danielle has been meeting with other **Black doulas** and reaching out to organizations like Black Women Aligned, the Black Doula Society of Ontario, the Black Fertility Agency and Rooted Birthwork Collective to start connecting and expanding our network. CWCLN has applied for funding to support training and mentoring new doulas and to provide peer support to new doulas, and the families they work with before and after birth. **CWCLN** sees doula support as vital to help mitigate the health disparities for **black birthing women**, while at the same time acknowledging that doulas need culturally relevant support and mentoring in order to succeed, especially in the case of doulas practicing in remote or rural locations.

OUR GOAL:

Build a network of trained, supported Black doulas in Ottawa and across Ontario to support Black racialized women and femmes and their families.



ENGAGEMENT & CONFERENCES

We've been really busy in 2025, working to expand our networks in **Ottawa** and **Toronto**, as well as across the country. Some of our networking and engagements this year include:

Fertility 101 webinar, Black Fertility Agency

Black Maternal Health Conference (Toronto)

Menopause Matters Conference (tentative)

Entered a partnership with My Third Bloom

Partnered as a community members with Black Women Aligned

Relationship building with community partners like the AIDS Committee of Ottawa, the Black Fertility Agency, Rooted Birthwork Collective, and members of the Black Doula Society of Ontario.

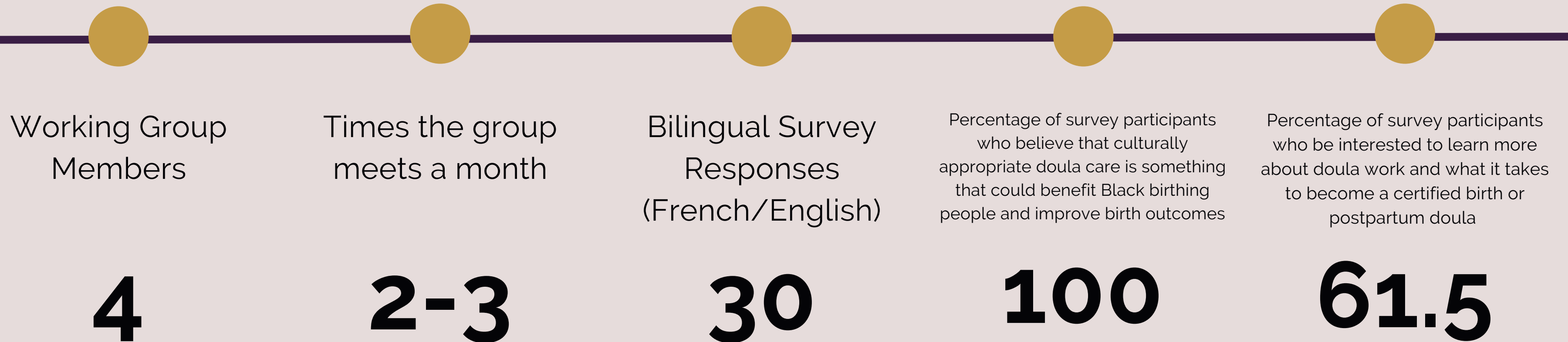


PUBLIC AWARENESS & BRANDING

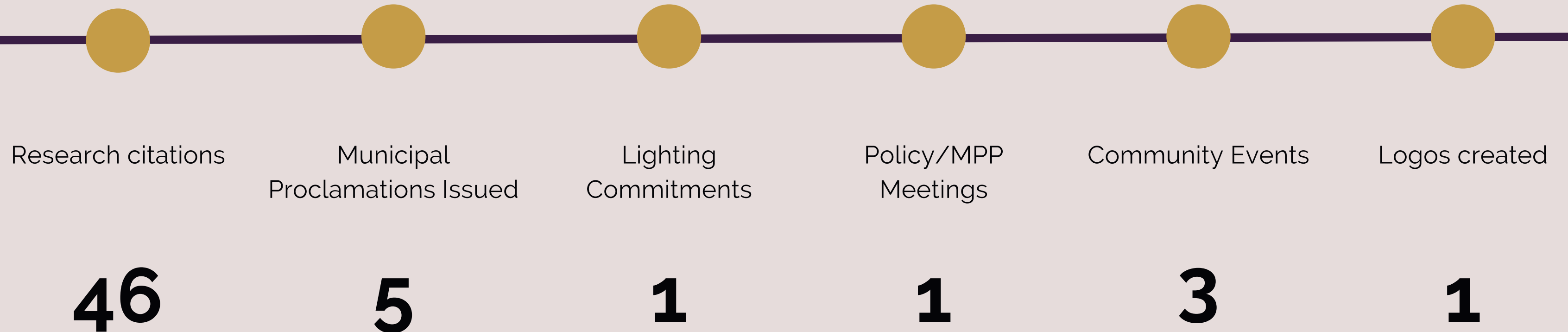
This year **CWCLN** launched a new logo in April for Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice Month on all our socials. We'll be using this logo for all our **Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice** materials in the future. The colours of our logo have special meaning. **Black** represents Black identities, strength and wisdom. We used **purple** to symbolize maternal health, justice and healing. The **gold** in our logo signifies hope, joy and the importance of thriving, not just surviving.



BY THE NUMBERS



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OUR NEXT STEPS

- Advocate for federal **recognition of April as Black Maternal Health Month**
- Expand **data collection** with partners and lobby for better collection with government and policy makers
- Engage more with Francophone and rural communities
- Assess community needs and develop a **Doula Collective** framework
- Build strategic **partnerships** locally, regionally and nationally



THANK YOU

Thank you for your support and partnership. Together, we can protect Black maternal health and build a future rooted in justice, care, and community.

This impact report was sponsored by the **South-East Ottawa Community Health Centre**.



South- East Ottawa Community
Health Centre
Centre de santé communautaire
du sude-est d'Ottawa

Thank you to our partners.



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Together, we can protect Black maternal health and build a future rooted in justice, care, and community.

Contact: info@canadianwomenofcolour.ca

