Here is what you missed at the October Alkebulan Circle!

"A single hand cannot nurse a child." ~ Tanzanian & Kenyan Proverb

We opened with playing "Sweet Mother" by Prince Nico Mbarga, then reflected on the proverb's call for shared wisdom, support, and responsibility—no single person or institution can meet all needs for a healthy well rounded child without the "village." It has to be a joint effort.

Recap on "*Centering Community in Maternal & Infant Health Research for African Immigrant Families*" with Drs. Safyer McKenzie-Sampson, PhD and Ehiremen Adesua Azugbene, PhD, MPH.

"I had a very, very firm father who was in at that time, you know, raised in the Marcus Garvey tradition. For those who don't know Marcus Garvey, he was a Jamaican Pan African activist who was very, very big in our community. And, you know, that was what I remember growing up with, you know, Africa for Africans, that even if we were from the Caribbean, our African heritage is what mattered. And so this is the ideology that I was raised with."

"I did my Master's at Florida International University in Miami, Florida ... I interacted a great deal with the Caribbean community there, and most of my friends, even my best friend currently, is a Caribbean person. All the meals, everything we did, a lot of interactions when I was there, and that was my actually first introduction into the United States, which was very soft landing. So I never understood, you know, the broader context of the kind of nuances that we face, until I kind of moved and moved to begin to work and live in other parts of the country."

As a perinatal epidemiologist, Dr. Safia highlighted why disaggregated data and lived experiences matter for African immigrant families. Looking only at "Black" or "immigrant" averages hides important differences by country of origin, language, time in the U.S., and region of care. Her work surfaces patterns often hidden by averages. For example, she highlighted patterns in rising severe maternal morbidity among African immigrant mothers in California, and C-section rates that vary by national origin. She also discussed how factors, such as time in the U.S., obstetric racism, insurance churn (especially postpartum), and limited language access, can compound risk and worsen outcomes. This underscores the need for culturally grounded care and nuance beyond "all African immigrants" as a single category.

Drawing on years of community-engaged work across the U.S. Dr. Azugbene centered co-creation, trust, and continuity relationship-based models of care—not research done to communities, but with them. She shared a refugee women's health clinic model where hospital-based cultural health navigators of Community Health Workers do far more than interpret. They prepare families for visits, surface traditional practices around pregnancy and newborn care, and follow up between appointments via trusted channels to help patients navigate care respectfully and bring traditions into clinical encounters. The result is greater trust, continuity, and uptake of services. She also underscored mental-health screening without stigma, father/partner engagement, and faith/community partnerships as core to maternal-infant wellbeing.

Across the discussion and chat, participants called for:

- Disaggregated data (by country, language, tenure in the U.S., status, region) to reveal real needs and target resources.

- Culturally responsive models (doulas, aunties, CHWs/navigators) that honor traditions and strengthen trust and uptake.
- Supportive networks that reduce isolation for new and long-settled families alike, because community presence shapes care access and outcomes.
- Intergenerational knowledge-sharing to balance Western guidance with African parenting and nutrition practices that sustain families.

The "village" showed up, again, reminding us that maternal and infant health improves when research, policy, and practice center community voice and African ways of knowing.

IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

Our October Alkebulan Circle officially closed the 2025 series.
Thank you for being part of our flagship conversations this year.

We're excited to kick off the next series in January 2026.

Stay tuned!

REGISTER FOR 2026 ALKEBULAN CIRCLES

Interested in being a guest speaker in 2026?
Please email info-aihrc@mac-boston.org with your topic focus, affiliation, and preferred month(s).

Contact us: info-aihrc@mac-boston.org

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