EMILY HARRIS: Welcome to the first webinar in the Disability & Philanthropy Forum 2021 series brought to you by the Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy. My name is Emily Harris and I use she/her pronouns. I come to you from the land of the Council of the Three Fires, the Odawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Nations, now known as the City of Chicago. As part of our commitment to accessibility, our panelists and I will each provide an audio description of ourselves. I'm a white woman with dark curly hair wearing rectangular glasses and a black turtleneck, and behind me is a screen made of rectangles of blonde wood and white paper. An important thing about me that you cannot see are my hearing aids, which are helping me to fully participate today. I'm proud to count myself as a member of the disability community. A few housekeeping items for today's webinar. We have live captioning today. There are two ways to access these captions. At the bottom of your screen is a small CC button. You can click that and choose subtitles or full transcript, which will pop-up as a box within your screen within Zoom. We're also providing a full transcript through StreamText if you prefer to access the captions in a separate window. The link to StreamText is now in the chat. Today, only our moderators and panelists will be on camera. You'll be muted throughout the event. This event is being recorded and you'll receive a link to the recording in the next week or so. Finally, at the end of this session, we will have time for your questions. Throughout the session, you have access to the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen. Please type your questions there and we will share them with the panelists. If the Q&A is not accessible to you, feel free to send your questions to communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org. You will not be able to communicate through chat today, but we will use it occasionally to share links to information as we already are. Again, if you want to ask a question, please use the Q&A function, and you can use that at any time during the panel discussion. We will save the questions for the end. We'll be Tweeting live today and hope you will join us on social media using the hashtag #DisabilityPhilanthropy. You can also follow along by connecting with us on Twitter at @DisPhilanthropy. And now on to our program. We're delighted today to begin a series of conversations about how disability intersects with social justice. Disability is a natural part of the human experience. Almost 1 in 5 people in the United States have disabilities. Disability can be apparent, such as a mobility disability that causes someone to use a wheelchair. But many disabilities are non-apparent, including chronic illness and mental health disabilities. Disabilities can be lifelong or acquired. We are the only minority group that anyone can join at any time. Race and disability are inextricably linked. Both are social constructs that are often used for the purposes of oppression and exclusion. Disability disproportionately affects people of color. Black and Native American individuals have the highest rates of disability. And people of color with disabilities are the most likely to live in poverty, be unemployed, and as we've seen in the current pandemic, experience adverse health consequences tied to the dual impact of racial and disability discrimination. Today, we'll hear from a panel of experts with lived experience who can help us to understand these disparities and challenge us to examine how applying a disability lens is critical to achieving racial equity. To moderate our panel, I'm delighted to introduce Helene Gayle, president and CEO of the Chicago community Trust, who is also a member of the Presidents' Council on Disability Inclusion in Philanthropy, which is bringing you today's webinar. The Chicago Community Trust is one of our nation's leading community foundations. And Helene brings a distinguished career in government, non-profit, and philanthropic leadership to their longterm goals of closing the racial ethnic wealth gap and making the Chicago Region a model for an equitable recovery. Her bio, and those of the panelists, are linked in the chat. Helene, thank you so much for leading our conversation today.

HELENE GAYLE: Great, thank you so much, Emily, and it is exciting to be able to moderate this panel and I know the time is going to fly. And we've got so much to discuss here today, and so I will try to be as brief as I can in my own introduction. And following your example, I will just give a brief kind of audio introduction to who I am. I'm never good at this, 'cause nobody likes to admit what they really look like. But I am a later-middle-aged adult African-American with medium length sisterlock hairdo. And I am sitting in an office surrounded by dark wood furniture. And pleased to be here. And I, too, am from the land of the Three Fires, the Odawa, Ojibwe and Potawatomi Nations that are now known as Chicago. But I think it is so important to recognize the historical lands on which we currently live. So thank you for that. And this conversation is incredibly important. As Emily said, as the Chicago Community Trust, we have made closing the racial and ethnic wealth gap our highest organizational priority. And in the context of that, it is important to examine the intersectionality of the disabilities community and the issues that are intersecting between those. Also personally as a woman who grew up in a household with a parent with chronic mental illness, I saw first-hand what it meant to have the stigma and shame that is associated with mental illness here in our country and around the world. And so for me, it is both personal as well as a professional passion to understand better the intersectionality of these issues, explore them, examine them, be honest with them, so we can move forward in how we address these issues. So, without further ado, I wanna move on to our panelists. And we've asked each panelist to do a similar thing, describing themselves very briefly and talking about who they are, an audio representation of who they are, as well as where they come from. And then we will start engaging in our dialogue and in our conversation. So, maybe I'll just start with Taryn. I'm gonna go the boxes as they are on my screen, and I will start with Taryn.

TARYN WILLIAMS: Thank you and good afternoon. I'm Taryn Mackenzie Williams. My pronouns are she, her, hers. And I come to you from the land of Nacotchtank Anacostans and Piscataway, which is now known as Washington, D.C. I am the managing director of the Poverty to Prosperity Program at the Center for American Progress. And I'm a black woman with my hair styled in a pretty dense and curly afro. And I'm wearing glasses and a colorful scarf. And I'm sitting in a room with blue walls. Thank you.

HELENE: D'Arcee.

D’ARCEE NEAL: Yes, hi. Good afternoon, everyone. My name is D'Arcee Charington Neal and my pronouns are he/him and they/them. I live here on the land of the Kaskaskia, the Shawandasse Tula, and the Myaamia, as well as the Hopewell Tribe that is now currently known as Columbus, Ohio, where I am a second year doctoral student in English and disability studies. And I am a dark-skinned black man with a white and black striped shirt sitting on a gray couch behind a white wall with blonde dreadlocks that is styled to the side.

HELENE: Thank you. Conchita.

CONCHITA HERNANDEZ LEGORRETA: Hello, I am Conchita Hernandez Legorreta. I go by she, her, ella pronouns. I come from the land of the Nacotchtank, I'm not sure if I'm pronouncing that correctly, and the Piscataway near what is now Washington, D.C. I was born in Jocotitlán Mexico, where the Otomi and Nahuatl reside. I'm wearing a red shawl, my hair is in a side braid, and I'm wearing beaded earrings. I am light-skinned, I oversee the education of blind students in Maryland, and I'm getting my doctorate in special education from George Washington University, and I am blind.

HELENE: Thank you very much. And I hope that gives people a good general description. But I'm going to move into asking each of our panelists to say a little bit about your own personal experience on the topic of race, disability, and equity. And just a couple of minutes, 'cause we've got lots to get into, so this isn't the whole story. Just a quick two minutes on how would you talk about how you hold those three things together at one point, which is your race, your ethnicity, disabilities, and how that relates to equity from where you sit. And maybe Conchita, we'll start with you.

CONCHITA: Okay. So to me, it means on one side not fully being accepted in most spaces, as many disability spaces are white. And disability spaces, for example, they may be talking about equity but totally disregard race, and they don't see the irony in that. But likewise, many spaces in the Latinx community do not understand disability and can by ableist while we're fighting for racial justice at the same time. So constantly being told that your identities that overlap are not the central focus of what's being fought for at the moment and that you need to wait. However, on the other hand, it's so much personal power to be able to hold space for who I am and to be able to connect with people that are in similar situations. It's driven me to be an activist, because every single issue is a racial and disability issue and impacts my community and myself. And the beautiful thing is that through activism, I was able to find a community of disabled activists who fight for racial and disability justice. So we support each other, we laugh with each other, we cry with each other, and we hold space for one another in a way that no other spaces can.

HELENE: Thank you. D'Arcee.

D’ARCEE: Yeah, thank you very much. I would say in answer to this question, I had a friend of mine who literally was like, "Disability is not raced." And he told me that I was making something up where it doesn't exist. But as a black queer, disabled man, I think that this primarily is a question of value. Men specifically are socialized to be providers in this country. And in almost every way that we think about disability in America, that revolves completely around production, reproduction, and worth. And so a lot of the ways that we think about this then intersect with the idea, as Conchita mentioned, with whiteness, and to even when we think about medical insurance and payment on the white side of the scale, to charity and low-income communities on the black side, all of it surround ideas of the perceptions of race. And even within the black communities, we have places of power that we recognize as cultural, tokens and perceptions like the barber shop or the hair salon. But those places are often not even accessible to disabled people. And so my activism a lot of times is talking about bringing voice to that side of the equation and how black communities can actually participate while being both black and catering to accessibility at the same time.

HELENE: Thank you. Taryn.

TARYN: Yes, thank you. So, this is Taryn speaking. I didn't grow up thinking of myself as a person with a disability. I grew up thinking I was black. I had a chronic condition from the age of five. But it was only after I moved into adulthood and I started to better understand the nature of my digestive disease and later my arthritis, that I learned about and came to see myself as a part of the diverse disability community. Both of these aspects shape who I am. They shape how I move through the world, the choices I make on a daily basis, and where and with whom I feel belonging. But I know I just can't answer that based on how I feel. I also have to acknowledge what others see. And I know people see me as a black woman. They don't see the disability. They don't see the chronic pain. They don't see the countless doctor's appointments. That only happens if I choose to disclose. And in the black community, we talk about this sort of as passing. We talk about things like class and colorism, and we acknowledge that we can exist at this intersection of multiple identities and carry different privilege within that. And I know that I carry privilege with my disability. And so that is what shapes my activism, just to build on what others have shared. It means that I relate to people with non-apparent disabilities and expect or know when we meet a person, we may not know all of what they carry. It also means that I am acutely aware that in my own lived experience, it's different from that of individuals with apparent disabilities. And part of my own work is in the spirit of learning and unlearning, and making sure that I'm making space for all of our perspectives. 'Cause even if we share these multiple marginalized identities, our experiences aren't the same.

HELENE: Yeah, so let me explore all of the comments that you all made. I have couple of questions. How do you wrestle with the hierarchy of your identity? And Taryn, your comments, people will see you as walking down the street and see you as a black woman. That's who they will relate to. But you have this other identity. How do you think about this hierarchy of identity, and particularly when it is not necessarily the first thing that people will see, how do you get people to enter into this intersectionality that all of you all talked about from where you sit and thinking about how society thinks about these different issues of diversity? And maybe D'Arcee, I'll start with you.

D’ARCEE: Sure. So I think that's a really interesting question. I know that within the disability community, there's always talk of, you know, the hierarchy of pretty. And they say that, you know, wheelchair users who sit are close to the top because we look quote, unquote "normalized." And that actually plays very much in our detriment. I know Taryn was talking about non-apparent disabilities. But as a person who can see my wheelchair immediately when I enter a room, I have spent my entire professional life arguing for respect. From the moment I come through the door working as an intern in various government agencies, because we've been socialized to believe that you should treat people with disabilities a certain kind of way, empathy starts bleeding into sympathy, which then starts bleeding into performance. And so I have constantly been battling from a very visual perspective of being taken seriously in almost anything I do when I have people speaking to me. I'm 34, about to be 35, and they speak to me like I'm six. And don't mean to. It comes from a decent place. But I say this specifically within work, because that has affected the work that I do and the work people offer me. And so just from my perspective, being very cognizant of the way it appears, and that you almost have to over-correct when you're in a wheelchair. You have to come through with a three-piece suit and my cufflinks on point every day because otherwise people just don't take you seriously.

HELENE: Either Conchita or Taryn wanna comment on kind of hierarchy of disabilities and how you grapple with that?

CONCHITA: Yeah. I think I was like nodding the whole time D'Arcee-

HELENE: Or hierarchy of identity. I'm sorry, I, yeah.

CONCHITA: Yeah. The whole time that D'Arcee was speaking, I was like, yes, everything that they're saying, and it's this idea of micro-aggression, right? So my disability is visible when I go out in public. People know that I'm disabled. And there's a certain confidence that people have that they don't have within other groups, that I'm randomly walking down a street and people feel like they can ask me about my medical history, that they can ask me, "Oh, are you really faking it?", that they can ask me all of these things that they would never ask any other person. And I think nothing's ever stagnant. There's some spaces where I do hold privilege, so I am light-skinned. Even though I am Mexican, I am light-skinned. So there's some times when I do hold privilege, and there's some times where I'm marginalized. So using those different spaces to kind of be in that space and be able to either hold space for yourself or hold space for other people is really important. And also, understanding how they all interact, and part of the disability community that D'Arcee was talking about is understanding that there's lots of disabilities such as hidden disabilities that was talked about earlier and how those of us who do have visual disabilities, who the audience knows about, how can we support those people in the disability community that have invisible disabilities and likewise, right? So I have people who stand up for me in public all the time. So it's just kind of a constant kind of examining our space and who we are, and we don't get the luxury of being anonymous in space. Like, we have to be proud and kind of like D'Arcee was saying, we have to overcompensate sometimes because it's very obvious that we're there.

HELENE: Thanks. Taryn, anything to add?

TARYN: No, I think they both really covered a lot of what I feel in my day-to-day experience, both at work and sort of walking through this world.

HELENE: Well, great. Let me move on to few other questions. D'Arcee, you've done some work around race and albinism and would love to hear your thoughts on that. What is it? How does it relate to racism? And particularly given kind of been a historical context of albinism and racism and how that shows up.

D'ARCEE: Sure, and I just wanted to clarify. I believe, just to clarify, you're referring to-

HELENE: Sorry, ableism.

D’ARCEE Ableism. Okay, yeah, 'cause albinism is something completely different.

HELENE: I said albinism.

D’ARCEE: No, that's totally fine. I just wanted to clarify. So it is ableism. Sure, I'm happy to do that. And yes, my work in my PhD does talk about disability erasure from Afrofuturism specifically. But the bottom line is that ableism is the belief in the value of a non-disabled body, and that our entire culture, all of our systems of power, and production and the way that we work and make money is in relation to this. However, I would also say that ableism doesn't just come from the outside. It affected me personally and directly because growing up as a child with cerebral palsy, a black child, you already know you're black. Your parents tell you you're black. And so therefore, we know our value is lessened. But ableism then follows up with that and told me I shouldn't even attempt to do better, because there were no black disabled people that were trying to do better. I would say that historically, this comes from the idea of Sarah Baartman. For many people, she's known as the Venus Hottentot or Saartjie Baartman, that's her Dutch name. She was a Dutch slave that lived in the colonies who had a deformation of the lower back which made her back kind of protrude. And basically, two doctors of the time period in the early 19th century made their medical fortunes off of dissecting her. And this developed into at a completely racist kind of medicine known as craniology. We know it as the measurement of skulls and things like that. That persisted through the Civil War and the creation something called a spirometer, which they used to measure lung capacity, which we still have. But the thing is that you have to understand that black people were already seen as different. They were already seen as other and low-key animal. So when the spirometer came about and the idea of lung capacity, it was first time in medical history that the United States had established a public health database which they used on the Civil War soldiers, which they split by race. That database is still being used today, most recently in the late '90s by a construction company who argue that they didn't have to pay black construction workers in Detroit due to asbestos because black lungs were trash was their argument based on this race database of the 1860s. And so this is a pervading idea that has continued through modern day and basically leads us up to where we are now. I was working with the World Bank last year as a consultant, and I was helping them to understand that when you have people with disabilities who wanna work for you, you have to take these kinds of things into consideration. I had to spend my entire life being told that, "You are different, you are other, and therefore, you are lesser." And I tried to help them understand that when they're creating applications and asking for accommodations, why on earth would you ask for an accommodation before you've even offered an interview? And so getting them to understand that ableism is so prevalent that it will keep people from even checking off the accommodations box is the whole point. You have to take that kind of thing into consideration when you're building up any kind of disability culture in your business. And oftentimes, companies don't know how to deal with that or talk about it, and so they do things they think are woke and appropriate and it just ends up being a series of missteps.

HELENE: So, from your experience, how do you feel that... If you think about yourself as black man already facing racism, do you feel that the black community is less able to deal with these issues because of already facing other challenges? Or is there a greater empathy? And how have you seen this play out in terms of ableism and race and racism and what that interconnection means?

D'ARCEE: So, the short answer to this-

HELENE: And obviously-

D’ARCEE: Of course.

HELENE: It is hard to generalize for sure, but I think there is this interesting interplay in communities that are already facing challenges and discrimination and how we think about these other issues that intersect with racism.

D’ARCEE: For sure, and I mean, like I said, in my work, I'm trying to coin a phrase that I call Afrophantasm to explain this very concept, which is that when it comes to disability within the black community directly, the disability part is erased. You are basically a living ghost inside your own community. It exists, they see it, but only tangentially. And a lot of that has to do with the fact that we have not kind of taken up the mantle of embodiment the way that we take it up with race. It might make people angry and upset to say it, but in my viewpoint, the way I view it, embodiment supersedes race because how you get up in the morning and how you feel in your body does not dictate whether you're black, white, Asian, or otherwise. And that part, the black community just has not come to terms with. We understand that black is beautiful and we've spent 50 years drilling that into our children. But like when we talk about embodiment and also loving your own body, my parents hated the fact that I was a wheelchair user until I was like 25. They fought very valiantly to keep me on crutches and a walker because to them, being ambulatory was far more important than everything else. And their argument was always, "You have enough on your plate." So, instead of really thinking about it in terms of me being a whole person, it gets compartmentalized into sections and then we start ranking. But like I said, I think that the key answer to this is embodiment. We have to take up the mantle of embodiment and put that as high or higher than race.

HELENE: Yeah, and your parents were just trying to do like any other parents wanna do, is to try to make things as easy for you as possible given what they know about the world and the way they knew the world was as black people and the hardship of black people. So it's very interesting to think about how do we integrate these different identities so that one doesn't get tossed aside for the other? So thank you for that. Conchita, maybe same question about ableism, but maybe talking about it from the standpoint of immigration, 'cause I know it's an area that you've worked a lot on and how does that play into how we think about immigration, and even as we think about the future of what we want immigration to look like?

CONCHITA: Yeah, so following up a little bit with what D’Arcee was talking about, within the Latinx community, I always talk about the lack of resources that exist due to language, due to cultural competency. And I think that's a big barrier for communities of color to access disability information. So like the disability rights when it started in California, I grew up in California, never heard of it my whole life until I went to higher education because they weren't outreaching to anybody other than the white community. And the black people that were doing a lot of the work have been erased from those narratives. So coming back to immigration, when immigration is brought up, it rarely includes disability, but like most issues, it disproportionately impacts disabled immigrants. So we saw it play out recently with the public charge rule. So the public charge is the idea that an immigrant who is seen as a burden on society and who needs certain services for existence, such as a person with disability, is not worthy of being welcomed and gaining legal status. So what this means for disabled immigrants is having to choose between food, shelter, and medical services or legal status. For many families, they decided not to seek food stamps, not to see medical care. However, this is not new because the United States has a history of enacting ableist policies to determine who are welcomed and who are not. I was undocumented, and so when I was undocumented I was not able to access services specific to disability. And it became very difficult to have a job that I could fulfill because I didn't have the training, the technology, or the support to make that happen. What many people don't realize is that services such as rehabilitation services for disability are only offered to residents as citizens. So immigrants with disabilities struggle to access any type of service. And where able-bodied immigrants can work labor-intensive jobs, that's not an option for many people that are disabled that are immigrants and accommodations are not provided. So ultimately immigrants and disabled immigrants specifically are either seen as this dichotomy of like being horrible or being hard workers for the country. And it comes back to the concept that D'Arcee was talking about earlier, where many immigrants with disabilities cannot work. And so there's little space in immigration conversations for disabled immigrants and where disabled immigrants fit in. So for example, the DACA program that was enacted under Obama that let young people get work permits and be able to study had some barriers for people with disabilities, such as graduation requirements or work requirements. So when we do move forward with immigration reform as the current administration has promised, we need to make sure that disabled immigrants are taken into account and that the ability to work is not a standard for a path to citizenship, as many disabled immigrants would not be able to fit these guidelines. Regarding kind of racism and immigration, our immigration system was built on racism just as it was built on ableism. Our very first law regarding naturalization from 1790 reserved citizenship by naturalization, I'm sorry, I have sirens going off in the back, to free white persons. So immigrants of color are disproportionately impacted by immigration policy. For example, the Muslim travel ban, ending temporary protective status, and separating children from their families. They all disproportionately affected immigrants of color. And oftentimes black immigrants, specifically African immigrants, are ignored in the immigration conversation as in disability. So for example, President Biden recently began a 100-day moratorium to stop deportations. However, planes continue to be charted to deport individuals and specifically they're deporting African asylum seekers and immigrants with little media coverage. So lastly, on this point the Latinx community is both a victim of racism and also perpetrators of anti-blackness. And we need to acknowledge the anti-blackness and ableism that kind of exists not only within the immigration system, but also within the Latinx community since racism and ableism feed off of each other. And it's specifically true in our immigration system.

HELENE: Great, thanks, and I think in both of your comments, I think the important aspect of how do we not put people with disabilities off to the side, but thinking of it as a really integrated part of our strategies is incredibly important. And so with that, maybe I'll turn it to Taryn. At Center For American Progress, you are also focused on some of the same issues that we are around closing the racial and ethnic wealth gap. And we've kind of taken the stance that while we don't have a, quote, disabilities track or initiative in terms of our grantmaking, we've thought of it in the sense that if we don't take this into consideration will we be able to achieve our goals? And so I'd love to hear you talk about how you, putting on your organizational hat, how are you thinking about how a focus on people with disabilities is actually key to achieving what you're trying to do? And examples of how if you don't, you're not gonna be able to get to the end goal of, how do we all focus on economic equity in our country?

TARYN: Yeah, that is a great question. And some of the conversations you're talking about are similar to the ones that we have at American Progress. I would say that if we overlook disability in our work, then we are overlooking the very real policies and the outdated systems that prevent us from achieving economic justice. So we were just talking about immigration. I'm going to move into housing. It's front of mind for me right now because of this growing eviction crisis that we're confronting. And if we were omitting disability, it would be like trying to address segregation, geographic segregation, that exists in our cities without examining the history of redlining, the patterns of investment by banks, and the ways in which the industry, in the case of investors all the way to realtors, either deliberately or through implicit bias reinforce who gets to live where and what communities get the most benefits. If we overlook disability in our work, then what we're doing is we're addressing consequences without paying full attention to the cause. And all of us in this space know from our work and our history what happens when policies are developed without addressing root causes. At best, we get unintended consequences. And at worst, we end up reproducing harm and looking at more devastation in the communities that we're trying to serve. And so again, just going back to that example, if we are not discussing disability and using a disability-explicit lens when we're talking about that, then that means sort of we don't know how many black and brown people are homeless because of a lack of access to affordable housing that is also assessable. If we're not talking about disability when we're talking about the housing crisis, then we don't know how many black and brown people are unable to save sufficient funds to purchase a home because they're struggling to access affordable care to pay for their expenses like prescriptions and personal attendants, or the equipment that they need, or the repairs on their chairs. If we're not using a disability-explicit lens, then we don't know how many black and brown people don't have jobs in their communities because they don't have access to assessable public transportation, to paratransits, to subways, the buses that really will include them and make sure they can get from their homes to their jobs. So if we're not explicitly bringing a disability lens to the conversation, then we are risking developing solutions without seeing the whole picture of the problem that we're trying to solve. And it's challenging. It's messy work when you're talking about systemic racism and we're talking about systemic ableism, but that bringing that lens is what's gonna make us more likely to produce those improved outcomes.

HELENE: Yeah, that's a great perspective. And I think it's one that often gets missed because I think people think about it as only from a diversity and inclusion and justice lens, and we should think about it from that standpoint, but I think if we really say what is our goal and how do we reach that goal, if we don't understand the obstacles firmly and what are some of those root issues, we're not gonna be able to achieve those goals. So I think that's a very, very important perspective. You talked a little bit about some of the racial equity movements and so maybe let me just move into asking all of you to talk a bit about how you see disabilities being addressed or not addressed in some of the racial equity movements that we're all involved in. And maybe D'Arcee, talk a bit about your role in Black Lives Matters and how you've tried to help to think about that issue, disabilities in the context of Black Lives Matter. And before you answer, I just wanna, to the audience, please put any questions that you have in the Q&A, not the chat box. We'll be looking at the Q&A and I'll be filtering in questions from the audience over the time of the session and try to get to as many of them as possible, but please put them in the Q&A and that's where we'll look at them. So D'Arcee. Black Lives Matter and disability.

D’ARCEE: Sure, so like I said, I look at this from an Afrofuturistic lens, mainly because Afrofuturism is the resounding statement that black people not only matter, but that in the future that we are the center of the conversation, like we've spent so many years being side comments and side characters in everybody else's story, that this is why stories and ideas like "Black Panther" resonate so strongly. That said, the biggest issue that I have with Black Lives Matter is that anytime it comes up in relation to disability, it's about death. And it seems like people continuously will bring up the statistic that over half of the people that have been killed and brutalized by the police have been people with disabilities. That's true, and I think that that is definitely necessary. It needs to be said. But what I'm also here for is black joy. I want black girl magic and black boy joy. I want it to extend directly to people with disabilities. I need joy and magic in my life as a grown 35-year-old black man with cerebral palsy. And quite frankly, the BLM media just does not show it. We're not there, and I think we deserve to be.

HELENE: Great. Conchita, I know you have been very involved and co-founder of the National Coalition of Latinx With Disabilities. Could you say something from that perspective of how that movement has actually helped to elevate the role of people with disability in the racial equity movement and what have been some of the challenges you've faced?

CONCHITA: Yeah, so tying a little bit with what D'Arcee was saying, there's so many spaces where we don't see what we wanna see in those spaces and we're not really accepted. And so part of that is creating the spaces ourselves of what we envision. So that's where the National Coalition of Latinx With Disabilities came about, where we didn't see this space in any racial organization, in any national organization around immigration, around race, and so we created it to be a place to share the hardships and also the joys, and create a community of people coming together. Because it is constantly a challenge to try and convince racial organizations working in the Latinx community that disability needs to be not just something you add at the end, but something that is embedded in your work. I read a quote recently that said, "Accessibility isn't the frosting on the cake. It's the sugar embedded in the batter." And I think that's how organizations need to look at it. I've been involved also in mutual aid in D.C., and mutual aid being the idea that we support each other when that void exists of services, of organizations, of joy, of struggle. And so being part in D.C. of a mutual aid organization focused on people with disabilities where we support each other in doing grocery runs for each other, buying diapers, we even got a personal care attendant for somebody. So being able to create those spaces that don't exist in the larger areas has been really important. And organizations, recently, I have seen a push in organizations that don't focus on disability, but it's been slow and it's a constant battle, and it's a little disappointing that it hasn't happen sooner, but I'm also given hope by younger generations. So like TikTok is something that's really blown up and a lot of young people are creating, are putting captions on all their videos. And when they don't other young people will call them out and say, "Hey, don't forget to put your caption." So they are creating accessibility. It's not perfect, and there's other inaccessible things, but how do we create those spaces for each other in a way that aren't created by institutions or organizations?

HELENE: Thanks, and Taryn, maybe from the policy perspective you might have some examples of perspective on how a focus on disabilities in the contents of racial equity can actually improve policy outcomes for both. We all make this somewhat perhaps overused example of how sidewalks were changed to meet needs of people with disabilities and how that's helped all of us. But it's a good example of how by focusing on access for people with disabilities, we end up creating things that actually help the whole population. So I'd love to hear your perspective from a policy standpoint where are those win-wins and how do you see this actually being something that advances racial equity at the same time as equity for people with disabilities?

TARYN: Sure, and I appreciate that you gave the curb cuts example because it is one that is often used in our community to talk about something that was originally created for people with disabilities, but really serves so many people. I would actually sort of talk about the work that I do, which is really related to economic justice. And I risk saying something that I hope others have heard before, but I think it's particularly important 'cause when we're talking about economic justice, we're talking about addressing poverty. And part of that means we're talking about addressing the fact that disability is a cause and a consequence of poverty. And we know that there are a disproportionate amount of people, particularly black and brown people, who live in poverty, just as there are a significant number of people with disabilities who live in poverty. And we can't address one, we can't address one on its own, we can't address it in a silo. If we attempt to do that, then we're really not going to get to the solutions. And a concrete example of that is sort of trying to... I've been talking about wages for the last couple of weeks. It's at the forefront everyone is talking about, as they well should, an increase in wages. But if we talk about economic opportunity and we ignore the fact that there's a system that penalizes people with disabilities, that forces them to make a choice between an opportunity to earn competitive wages or the ability to access the supports and services that they need to live in their communities, then we're not actually going to address poverty. What we're doing is we may be able to create what are, it's ableist language, people talk about ladders of economic opportunity or ladders of economic mobility and how if we just create them, then people will come. But in fact, we would be creating them, but we would have done it in a siloed way and we'll have ignored the fact that it doesn't actually extend to people with disabilities. So again, we have to consider this disability-explicit and race-explicit lens when we're doing this work. And I often will say to investors and to donors and the philanthropic community, "You should be asking yourselves the question about how is the work that I'm supporting in education and health and economic justice and democracy, how does that intersect with disability? Are are the organizations and the programs we support inclusive of people with disabilities? Have we asked our grantees to be accountable for that information? And if we haven't, why not?" And if we're not doing that, then it goes back to something I was saying before and what all of us are really talking about here today is we're not gonna be able to address the full challenge that people face because we're not addressing some of those root causes.

HELENE: So thank you for that. And there's lots of questions and we're not gonna be able to get to all of them, sorry, because this has been such a conversation. But maybe Conchita, talk a bit about education. You've done a lot of work and focus on the issue of education. Obviously education is huge for overcoming inequity, preparing people for the workforce, et cetera. In what ways do racial and disabilities disparities intersect in the educational context and what are some of the things that you've seen that have actually been helpful in cutting through some of that?

CONCHITA: Yeah, so that's a really good question 'cause there's many disparities in education. One being the disproportionate number of students of color placed into certain disability categories and then being underrepresented in others based on biases that educators have on who is autistic and who is not, and who has a learning disability and who is not. Suspension rates are also an alarming trend we really need to be paying attention to. The U.S. Department of Education releases data year after year that black students with disabilities are significantly more likely to be suspended than any other group across the country. So students with disabilities who do end up succeeding in school and moving on to work or in higher education, they tend to be white students who have the cultural capital, the parent advocacy skills, and whose only other marginalization is disability. And the last issue I wanna mention is the lack of accessible content for students with disabilities. And it goes back to talking about policy, right? Even though there is policy, even though the laws are in place, general education teachers and even special education teachers do not learn how to make their content accessible for students with disabilities. And students struggle because of this. An example is blind and low vision students have some of the highest acceptance rates into higher education, but they also have the highest dropout rates, specifically due to the lack of accessible materials. And this leads to very high unemployment rates for people with disabilities and even higher rates specifically for people of color with disabilities. One of the challenges in overcoming the disparities in education is dealing with bias, right? So if policy's put into place to help with disproportionality, for example, but teachers on the ground still hold racial and ableist bias, there's really not gonna be much movement forward. So we need to learn about disability rights, about disability justice, and not learning about that in school is really harming both students and teachers. We need to hire more disabled teachers of color, as there's very few of us and we are the exception. We need to introduce students with disabilities to disabled mentors and do the same for educators. So many educators that I've worked with in special education have zero relationships with the disability community. And so this is a huge disservice to their students because then the success of their students is merely a theoretical practice and not based on them knowing real experiences of people with disabilities. So education is a huge impact on economic stability, on so many of the issues that we're talking about and we're failing students there. And so it leads to lifelong disparity.

HELENE: Great. I knew this time was gonna fly and this has been such a great conversation. I'm going to ask one last question for you all to just kind of lightning round close on, and then I'm gonna turn it back over to Emily. And sorry for all the great questions that are in the Q&A, having encouraged you to put them in there. We can't answer them. But we'll look at them and hopefully figure out a way of perhaps getting some responses back. But it is hard to not talk about this COVID moment. And so I would like to have each of you very briefly just say a little bit about your thinking around how COVID, the pandemic, the vaccine effort, have impacted the disabilities community and what should we all be thinking about as we look at the response to COVID, whether it's from an unemployment lens, whether it's from a vaccine accessibility lens, whatever lens you wanna take it. Just a word about how you're viewing this moment of COVID and the impact that it's having on disabilities community. And I'll start with you, Taryn. And these are just lightening round 'cause we're at the end.

TARYN: Yeah, I would just point to, as I look at the last year, it's been its own form of trauma. There's just simply no other word to express what it's like living through a pandemic, knowing by virtue of your identity, your race, your disability, you have increased risk. I've also seen, though, in the last nine or ten months the beginnings of conversations and movements, and I say the beginning of the movements but the movements have been going on for a long time, where people are starting to grapple really and start to understand with the intersection between race and disability. And they're seeing the outcomes, the disproportionate outcomes when we don't address it. And so even though the progress is achingly slow, that's a moment where sometimes I find glimmers of hope even through this very difficult time.

HELENE: Thank you. D'Arcee.

D’ARCEE: I know for me, like Taryn said, if I see one more political pundit talking about how black people are disproportionately capable of developing COVID, but then won't turn around and provide vaccinations to these supposed black communities that you just said were at increased risk, the two things to me make it almost impossible for this situation and they kind of cancel each other out. So really I hope going forward that they take into consideration on people that are vulnerable and actually make a concerted effort to seek these people out and to actually deal with the issue as it is, because COVID can go away if we get the vaccine into the hands of the right people so that way others can stay home and stay safe, but you have to actually do that work.

HELENE: Thank you. Conchita, last word.

CONCHITA: Kind of following a little bit with what D'Arcee said, it's impacting disproportionately, right? The highest likely to result in death due to COVID groups are black, Native American, and Latinx communities in that order. And we're not getting the vaccines to those communities. Disproportionately, white people are being vaccinated. And an example, a tangible example of that, is what's happening in California right now where the governor decided that people with disabilities were not going to be into the formula of getting vaccinated. It was gonna be merely on age. And so it's created huge barriers because a lot of people disabilities that are immunocompromised have been staying home this whole time because it literally can mean death. And so disability was not part of the decision-making, and it is now greatly impacting the disability community specifically in California, who will not be able to access the vaccine.

HELENE: Well, thank you. We could go on for another hour or another two hours. You all have been fabulous. Great input, great perspective, great wisdom. Thank you so much for your time. I've learned a lot and really appreciate having the opportunity to moderate this incredible conversation. So Emily, over to you.

EMILY: Thank you so much, Helene and panelists. I could listen to you all day, so thank you so much. Two quick words, you'll get a survey after this webinar and please answer it to help us continue these conversations and join the conversation. Helene, you set us up beautifully for the next one which is on health, equity, and disability. So if you wanna hear more about how the pandemic plays out and how all of these social determinants of health, join us on April 15th. There's a link on your screen to the rest of our series. We will be continuing these conversations all year. Finally, more information at disabilityphilanthropy.org. If you are working in philanthropy, become a member, it's free, and you can join these conversations in multiple ways so that we can really make sure that philanthropy is a catalyst for moving these conversations forward and making sure that disability is centered in all conversations about social justice. Thank you everyone for being with us. Thank you, panelists. We look forward to continuing the conversation.