



weitzman institute *Symposium*

MAY
2024

Representation Matters

KEYNOTE PRESENTATION #2

SYMPOSIUM BRIEF

Centering Lived Experiences in Healthcare Delivery and Innovation

On the afternoon of May 15, 2024, the [Weitzman Institute](https://www.weitzmaninstitute.org)'s 2024 Symposium afternoon keynote speaker, **Hafeezah Muhammad**, discussed her role as CEO of [Backpack Healthcare](https://www.backpackhealthcare.com), building on the 2024 Symposium theme, "Representation Matters." Ms. Muhammad shared her journey from advocate to tech founder, her passion for improving youth mental health outcomes, and the importance of centering patient voices in healthcare.

Centering Lived Experiences

Hafeezah Muhammad is an extraordinary mompreneur, passionate about leveraging technology to address critical societal issues. She brings years of experience in healthcare and technology to her role as founder and CEO of Backpack Healthcare, an artificial intelligence (AI)-focused company offering interactive virtual companions, therapeutic chatbots, and advanced data analytics to empower children to navigate their emotional well-being with confidence and resilience.

Thanks to advocates and entrepreneurs like Ms. Muhammad, healthcare professionals are increasingly recognizing the pivotal role of patients and families in care systems. She opened her keynote by describing her personal journey with the healthcare system, focusing on her daughter's battle with respiratory syncytial virus (RSV), which can be extremely dangerous for young babies. Ms. Muhammad found herself in a hospital surrounded by providers who did not look like her, yet she fought for the best treatment for her daughter. Her persistence and strength, as well as some much-needed encouragement from a fellow Caribbean woman, who in this case was her daughter's nurse, helped her persevere. After a frightening ICU stay, her daughter pulled through and Ms. Muhammad was left with an extreme **appreciation for the resilience, determination, and strength needed to navigate our broken healthcare system.** Ms. Muhammad also described her exposure to youth suicide issues and how this led to her passion to improve youth access to mental healthcare.

Ms. Muhammad's experiences also underscore how important clear communication is in healthcare. Being proactive by talking with medical professionals and seeking help from other sources shows how transparency and teamwork between patients and providers can build trust and help families make informed decisions, especially in critical situations like her daughter's ICU stay. Ms. Muhammad's focus on bringing

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Bringing patient and family perspectives into healthcare delivery and policymaking can help healthcare systems evolve.
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SPEAKER:
Hafeezah Muhammad
CEO,
Backpack Healthcare

**AFTERNOON
KEYNOTE**



patient and family perspectives into healthcare delivery and policymaking can help healthcare systems evolve. By including these voices, institutions can create a more open, equitable and accountable environment. This will also help policymakers understand the people they serve as well as the complexities of healthcare systems, leading to more effective strategies that meet the needs of all communities.

Healthcare Efficiency with AI

The integration of AI to improve healthcare efficiency is on the increase in today’s tech-driven landscape, and is crucial in advancing patient care delivery. By using AI, Ms. Muhammad explained, healthcare organizations can better allocate resources, reduce paperwork, and devote more time and resources to direct patient care. Ms. Muhammad is paving the way for healthcare providers to adopt AI solutions, easing the workload for frontline workers. Her partnerships with tech giants like Google, which train healthcare AI models, demonstrates a proactive approach to enhancing healthcare delivery—highlighting **the potential of AI to**

address complex healthcare challenges and increase equity. Ms. Muhammad’s focus on using AI specifically for youth mental health also highlights how technology can enhance mental health services and support systems. By creating personalized AI tools for young patients and their families, healthcare providers can promote early intervention, improve access to care, and reduce the stigma associated with mental health issues.

Reimagining Primary Care

Ms. Muhammad has led Backpack Healthcare to the forefront of pediatric mental health by combining scientific innovation, political insight, and public health principles.

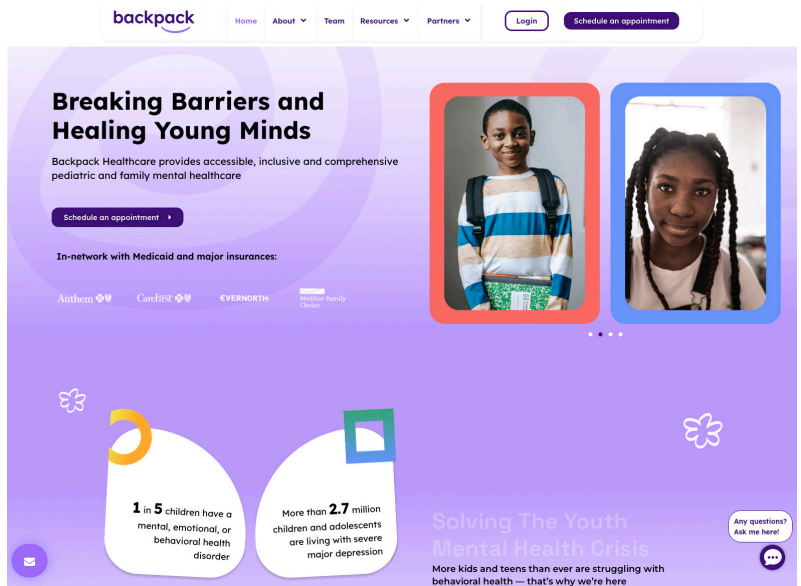


Figure 1. Backpack Healthcare website. Source: [Backpack Healthcare](#)

“We want to be the company that no matter who you are, once you come to Backpack, you know you can get taken care of.”

Ms. Muhammad’s vision for Backpack breaks away from conventional norms. At the center of Backpack’s model is a holistic approach to care. Backpack Healthcare recognizes how family dynamics affect mental health, and aims to provide supports that encompass all aspects of a person’s well-being. They strive to ensure equal access to mental health services for all families, regardless of insurance coverage, **emphasizing health as a human right.** Backpack’s approach also incorporates parental substance use disorder in its care model, reflecting a commitment to tackling underlying health issues and promoting health equity.

Implications of Representation in Healthcare

Improving primary care starts with prioritizing responsiveness to the diverse needs of our communities, Ms. Muhammad explained. It’s important to tailor healthcare systems to meet the unique requirements of different groups, ensuring everyone receives appropriate care, regardless of their background or circumstances. Throughout the keynote, Ms. Muhammad highlighted areas for healthcare improvement. First, she pointed out the gap in mental health treatment for children, stressing the need for earlier interventions to better support children’s mental well-being in the long term. Ms. Muhammad also emphasized the importance of ethical AI implementation for marginalized groups, particularly regarding privacy and consent. Upholding patients’ rights and ensuring



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transparency in AI use are crucial for building trust between patients and healthcare providers. Ms. Muhammad also stressed the importance of cultural humility. Recognizing and respecting diverse cultural perspectives are essential steps toward building a healthcare system that meets the needs of all patients. **“Each of us has the power to drive change within our organizations and communities,”** Ms. Muhammad stated. By doing so, healthcare providers can ensure patients feel respected, understood, and empowered to participate in their care—ensuring that everyone has equitable access to services.

Find additional 2024 Weitzman Institute Symposium Briefs and recordings at <https://www.weitzmaninstitute.org/2024-symposium-session-briefs/>

For More Information

Contact **April Joy Damian**, PhD, MSc, CHPM, PMP, Vice President and Director of the Weitzman Institute at damiana@mwhs1.com.

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