Growing intrigue around national adverse childhood experiences (ACE) data and studies linking commonly known symptoms of unresolved trauma—depression, anxiety, substance use, avoidance—to higher risk for poor birth outcomes, led B’more for Healthy Babies (BHB) leadership and partners to believe that there is a path for strengthening all BHB programs and services. The 10-year Baltimore City initiative—that aims for full-term babies born ready to thrive in healthy families—is piloting the Creating Cultures of Trauma-Informed Care model (developed by Community Connections in Washington D.C.) through its B’more Fit for Healthy Babies (B’more Fit) postpartum weight-loss program. The intent is to incorporate the model throughout all BHB programs and services.

The trauma-informed care model engages B’more Fit in culture change, emphasizing core values in every facet of program activities, physical settings, and relationships. In essence the culture change will help staff and partners become more aware of the prevalence of abuse in the lives of B’more Fit participants, leading to better engagement in program services and prevent inadvertent re-traumatization.

“Many of our participants grapple daily with food insecurity, unsafe neighborhoods, and other stressors,” said Stacey Tuck, Program Director of B’more Fit at Baltimore City Health Department. “We’re using all this information to educate our staff and partners about what’s really going on with all the women we serve.”

To date B’more Fit has established a trauma workgroup and created a guiding statement for trauma-informed care. The work group has gathered baseline data on B’more Fit’s adherence to the principles of trauma-informed care through a quantitative survey and focus groups. They’ve also identified targets for policy and systems change through detailed, “process-mapping” of B’more Fit Services. B’more Fit has already introduced some service changes to include the incorporation of a, “mindful minute” into fitness classes and building trauma-informed care into the program’s obesity management toolkit for OB/GYNs.

B’more Fit participant Kysha Shaw, mother of an 8-month-old son in June 2016 (Caleb) and a 16-year-old-daughter (Kiya), said the program is a much needed healthy resource for the community and the way in which staff engage participants is helpful.

“There are not a lot of healthy resources in the community where I’m from, but the people who live in the community really want to do well [health, education, employment, etc.] for themselves and their families,” Shaw said. “The B’more Fit [team] does a great job of getting to know the women and providing that sense of community and support. They help everyone realize that their health is important for their own lives and their children’s lives.”

Additionally, B’more Fit leadership and frontline supervisors in the Health Department’s Bureau of Maternal and Child Health also participated in a mindfulness retreat in 2013 and workshops throughout 2014—led by Amy Bloom Connolly, Director of the Center for Mindful Awareness—to ensure that they are ready to support trauma-informed change at the systems and services levels and to support program staff in learning trauma-responsive strategies for providing services to participants.
B’more for Healthy Babies (BHB) was launched in 2009 by the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health at the Baltimore City Health Department with lead implementation partners Family League of Maryland and Baltimore and HealthCare Access Maryland. It is a series of programs that enlists the help of more than 100 organizations to engage communities and families in healthier behaviors. These efforts have played a significant role in helping the city reach an infant mortality rate milestone, 9.7 deaths per 1,000 live births (2012); the city’s lowest rate in recorded history.

B’more Fit for Healthy Babies (B’more Fit) program is part of the larger BHB initiative and aims to help mothers reach a healthy weight in between pregnancies. B’more Fit programming occurs in the Upton/Druid Heights neighborhood (predominantly African American) where the pre-pregnancy obesity rate in 2011 was 41.285 percent and the Patterson Park neighborhood (predominantly Latin American) where the pre-pregnancy obesity rate in 2011 was 31.48 percent. The program has served more than 500 women and aims to serve 1,400 women by 2016.