

Introducing the Reproductive Well-Being Framework Podcast Series

Podcast Transcript

Episode 1: Building Momentum: From Intentionality to Reproductive Well-Being

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (00:09):

Hello, and welcome to a new podcast series focused on reproductive well-being. This podcast is a partnership between Power to Decide and the Reproductive Health National Training Center, with funding from the Office of Population Affairs and the Office on Women's Health. Its contents are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official views of OPA or HHS.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (00:32):

In this series, we will explore the reproductive well-being framework, which strives to ensure that all people have the information, services and support they need to have control over their bodies and to make their own decisions related to sexuality and reproduction throughout their lives.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (00:47):

My name is Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley and I'm the CEO of Power to Decide. I have over 20 years of experience in this field, including as a practicing OBGYN with a dedication and commitment to reproductive health inequity. Today we have with us Power to Decide's Chief of Staff, Dr. Gillian Sealy. Gillian has a PhD in health science and deep experience leading policy and systems work in a variety of settings, including schools and communities, as well as expertise in the social determinants of health. She's worked at the local, regional and national level and has built scaling and sustainability strategies for these settings.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (01:23):

In this episode, we're going to discuss reproductive well-being. Power to Decide has been working with more than 40 national, state and local organizations to build a nationwide reproductive well-being movement. Today, we would like to tell you more about this impactful framework and how it can be utilized to ensure that people have access to the supports and services they need, to determine if, when and under what circumstances to have a child and to support a healthy start for the next generation.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (01:50):

So, let's dive in. Gillian, I'd love for you to start by just telling us about the reproductive well-being framework, how it was developed, who was involved in that process and what did the process reveal?

Dr. Gillian Sealy (02:04):

Thank you, Reagan, for having me on. I'm really excited to talk about something that I'm very passionate about. So, reproductive well-being started in 2017. We were very grateful, as an organization here at Power to Decide, to receive funding to really look at sexual and reproductive health of individuals and what levers needed to be pulled to ensure that they had optimal sexual and reproductive health. And so, we knew that we could not do this alone. And so, had to engage national organizations. At the time, we didn't know how this work would transpire, right? We didn't know what the findings would reveal. We didn't know what documents we would create. And so, at the outset we called it an intentionality movement. And one of the reasons for that was that, as an organization, we had done some surveying, we'd heard anecdotally from young people who did not want to become pregnant, wanted to be able to use and look at various methods of contraception, but then did not follow through on not wanting to become pregnant and using contraception.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (03:17):

So, their intention did not match their behavior for a variety of reasons, not of their own making. There were barriers to access, et cetera. And so, we thought we'd love for folks to be intentional about their reproductive and sexual health. So, we connected with a variety of organizations that span the spectrum. Whether that was public health organizations. Whether that was governmental agencies. Whether that was providers, healthcare networks. Because one of the things that we also knew at the outset, though, is that the social determinants of health was at the root of understanding why sexual and reproductive health services were not being met in meeting people where they were.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (04:06):

So, we reached out and pulled together over 40 organizations to help us build this intentionality movement. In that first meeting, as we brought together 40 national organizations, one of the first things that we heard very early on and very clearly is that intentionality was not the word that should be used. Because there are a variety of reasons why intention, depending on where you sit and what communities you're in, suggests that people have power as it relates to their sexual or reproductive health.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (04:44):

And we know that that is not true because people lack access. There are many barriers to people fulfilling their sexual and reproductive health. And so the group decided very early on that we would need to change that word intentionality. And in subsequent meetings, we tried to think about what word could we use, what phrasing could we use that would be impactful around the word that we were wanting to do. And in talking to the group and that group talking to their constituents and colleagues and people in communities and doing focus grouping, reproductive well-being was born.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (05:27):

When we think about other frameworks of support, right? That sort of directly or indirectly relate to optimizing sexual and reproductive health. There's the reproductive health space, which is often where I've operated around sort of what happens in the clinic settings and in health centers, their provider patient interaction, right? There's reproductive rights, which is about the policy and the laws that impact someone's ability to access care. And then reproductive justice,

which is about all that and so much more, including movement building among people, especially people of color, to ensure that people have access to the services and to ensure that people can decide whether or not to have children and raise those children in positive environments.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (06:12):

How does reproductive well-being differ from these frameworks? How is it situated in reference to reproductive justice, reproductive health and reproductive rights?

Dr. Gillian Sealy (06:23):

So, I think that's a really important question. I think one of the things that we knew very early on, one of the things that we thought to ourselves, and we were very conscious about, is that we didn't want to co-opt where that had already been taking place, as well as we didn't want to duplicate efforts. We really wanted to see reproductive well-being as being complementary to reproductive health, reproductive rights and reproductive justice. And we knew that these, especially reproductive rights and reproductive justice, had paved the way for us to be able to do that work that we are doing and that we continue to do. And so, for us, we actually see it as the intersection of all of these movements, right? Look, I think we have a big tent. We want to make sure that reproductive rights, justice and health are walking alongside us as we build out this framework. Not just for communities, but for systems, because we want to make sure that systems are also developed so that they can support an individual's rights, their justice, their health, as it relates to reproductive well-being.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (07:35):

So, we saw, again, this is being complimentary at the intersection, at the crossroads of the work that had already been taking place. And we knew that reproductive well-being, as we looked at what levers needed to be pulled, included some of the levers that rights and justice were looking at, but also included policy. We wanted to make sure that they were supportive policies as it related to reproductive well-being. We wanted to make sure that any work that we did was culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate. We wanted to make sure that we had a shared learning collaborative around this work. It does us no good if we do this in a vacuum and are not taking what we learn at the national level, translating it to the community level and really learning from what we are hearing and the work that we're doing.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (08:36):

And we feel that as we learn and as we move in this work that we can add to the work that reproductive rights, justice and health are doing. And so, for us, again, we want to be complementary and in working on the reproductive well-being and the documents that we have created and the communities that we're working in, we have invited many of the organizations that represent rights, justice, and health to sit at the table with us as we create and develop this movement.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (09:16):

I love that. I love that. So, I'd love to hear more about the application of reproductive well-being, right? How do we apply this reproductive well-being framework and what does this mindset bring to the field?

Dr. Gillian Sealy (09:28):

Absolutely. So, what we discovered was that there were seven levers that we agreed on, collectively, that needed to be pulled. And it helped us develop a national blueprint for action. And what this national blueprint for action framework did was that it was a commitment from organizations to use the framework that we had developed to institutionalize reproductive well-being at the national level within their organizations. And some of the things that we identified was, as I mentioned before, policies that were supportive of reproductive and sexual health. And so, we had organizations within our collective who specifically focused on policy. And so, we're going to be tasked with dealing with what policies might they be looking at and advocating for, as it related to sexual reproductive health.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (10:26):

One of the other things that we realized, as I mentioned, is that we needed a shared learning collaborative in communities. And so, Power to Decide worked, not just with the 40 organizations steering committee, but also developed an expert panel of people who were on the ground doing this work, who could tell us and inform us on developing a community framework for how this work could be undertaken. So, that was the second thing that we realized was needed.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (10:55):

The third thing that we realized, that we're still working on, is developing a measurement framework for reproductive well-being. How do you measure that reproductive well-being has been met in a community? Has been met at the national level? That physicians are using, or providers are using the tenants? And so, we pull together experts in the field to really talk about and think about what a reproductive well-being framework might look like.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (11:23):

And then one of the big pieces is that we wanted to have a reproductive well-being narrative. How do we ensure whether it's Power to Decide, reproductive health, rights or justice organizations that were all speaking from the same hymn book, right? Just to give a phrase. That when we talk about reproductive well-being, that we're all talking about similar or the same thing, because if we, as organizations, are not clear on what reproductive well-being is and the tenants of reproductive well-being, we can't expect the individuals who we hope to impact to understand what that was. So, these form the applications that, very concrete things that we came up with that needed to happen. And I will tell you from a Power to Decide standpoint, I think we have done a good job of institutionalizing reproductive well-being so much so that it's at the underpinning of all the work that we do.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (12:23):

Love that. And we're constantly talking about inculcating reproductive well-being principles in all of our work. And what I love about the shared learning collaborative is it's expanding that, right? It's expanding that to community projects. People on the ground doing this work in their own spaces. And they're sharing information with one another and helping one another address challenges to reproductive well-being in their own communities.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (12:49):

I'd love if you would share maybe just a little bit about one of the projects and what you're excited about that they're working on.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (12:56):

We're currently working with eight communities who are all very diverse communities across the country. And I think one of the things that we have been extremely happy about, and they've really showed us the work that they're doing. As we know, during the pandemic things have been, to say the least, challenging for many of those communities as they're dealing with the pandemic. And some of the individuals who are part of the shared learning collaborative are physicians. So, they're dealing on the front lines, but nonetheless, this has not diminished their commitment to looking at reproductive well-being in all the spaces and in all the things that they're touching. And one example of this was one of our communities came to us and said, look, we are definitely focused on COVID, but we understand that reproductive well-being is very important. And so, how can we marry the two of these things?

Dr. Gillian Sealy (14:04):

And one of our communities came up with understanding and realizing that there are many myths and misconceptions. I like to call them myth conceptions that are out there or route COVID, the vaccine for COVID and fertility. And talked about how can we dispel these myths? And they actually had a session. They had a fair, a street fair, which included a session on reproductive well-being and dispelling some of the myths, primarily in African American communities, around COVID, vaccines and fertility.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (14:42):

And so, this is just one example of communities using the knowledge that they're gaining through the shared learning collaborative, but using that for practical application in communities. And I've been really pleasantly surprised that when we started this work in 2017, nobody had really heard about reproductive well-being. People were like, what is it? I don't know what it is. It sounds, I don't know. It sounds strange. And now more and more in national spaces, we're hearing the word reproductive well-being being used much more.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (15:16):

And so, I think one of the things that we're seeing is exactly what we want to happen, right? That this becomes a narrative. You have to have a shift, a cultural shift, right, when you're looking at doing movement building work. It needs to be a paradigm shift. And so, we're seeing paradigm shifts, albeit small. When you look at other movements, whether it's Me Too, or other movements, it takes time. It doesn't happen overnight. But, I will say, with our community work, with our national work and hopefully with our measurement work, we will definitely see some impacts over time.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (15:53):

I love that. Just sort of putting the paradigm shift involved with the reproductive well-being movement, right? And centering the power and centering the responsibility on the system itself, to ensure that the system is designed so that people have access to the supports and services that they need, it is incumbent on us to do that work, right? Rather than shaming and blaming people for their reproductive decisions. It's a really powerful framework. I'm so grateful to you and all of the colleagues who participated in creating reproductive well-being.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (16:26):

Is there anything that I didn't ask you about this reproductive well-being framework that you'd like to share?

Dr. Gillian Sealy (16:31):

Only thing I will say is that it's not a stop and start type of framework. This framework... We'll constantly be building on this framework, right? We constantly want to talk to communities and have communities tell us, this is what we're seeing. Helping us to really shape the narrative for various audiences. I think in the past, we assumed that one size fits all. And as we know from public health and you and I know, Raegan, that one size does not fit all. It's not cookie cutter. And so, we are wanting to be humble, right, as we're learning and working with organizations and individuals and systems about how we can make this better.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (17:16):

I think the only other thing I will say is that out of reproductive well-being and talking about the narrative and how we talk about it, in addition to the definition that we had, we also came up with four pillars. And I know we'll be talking about this in subsequent conversations, but we came up with four pillars around reproductive well-being. We want to make sure that people are seen and heard. That they're respected for the decisions and trusted by providers as they make reproductive well-being decisions. We want to make sure that they have autonomy, that people have the freedom and safety, the experience, the sexual experience, sexuality, as they want to experience it. That people are in control. That people receive access to all the information because we want to make sure that people get accurate and resonant information and then be able to make decisions for themselves and their families.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (18:12):

And then finally, to your point, we want to make sure that people have a system of support, right? It does us no good to talk about reproductive well-being if the systems are not there to support people in their choices.

Dr. Gillian Sealy (18:25):

And so, that's what I would want to make sure is included in this. And again, it is not a start and stop. And I think Power to Decide welcomes even additional organizations that were not part of the initial 40 organization steering committee who led this work. We continue to have an open tent for anyone who sees the work that we're doing, has a passion for this work, understands that it is impactful. We welcome you to sit at the table as we continue to do this work.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (19:02):

Well, thank you, Gillian. I'm so grateful to work with you and to be a part of this organization that's working to disseminate and grow the reproductive well-being movement. As Gillian stated, in our next podcast, we'll be diving into the four pillars that are essential to reproductive well-being. So, we hope that you will join us for that podcast as well. Thank you so much, Gillian, for this informative discussion. It was so great to have you here to teach us about reproductive well-being. To follow the work of Gillian, please follow @tw4acause on Twitter. That's TWT, four, the number four, a cause. You can follow me at, @DrRaegan on Twitter. And you can stay connected with Power to Decide by following @powertodecide on all platforms.

Dr. Raegan McDonald-Mosley (19:46):

This podcast was produced as a partnership between Power to Decide and the Reproductive Health National Training Center. You can learn more at rhntc.org.