

# It's time to DECLARE RACISM A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

# IT'S TIME >>> FOR EQUITY

WORKING DOCUMENT 2/25/20

## Anti-racism Action to be Taken on Four Levels: Individual - Organizational - Community - Legislative

The data is clear that racism is negatively impacting the lives of people of color here in Cleveland and throughout Cuyahoga County as well as nationally. In 1619, the first ship containing enslaved Africans arrived in British North America. Eighty-six percent of the following 400 years of black America's experience was under slavery and Jim Crow laws which provided preferential opportunity to some citizens while simultaneously subjecting people of color to hardship and disadvantage. Since then, racism — not race — has caused disproportionately high rates of homelessness, incarceration, poor education and health outcomes, and economic hardship for African Americans. Racism acts on systemic, institutional and interpersonal levels, all of which operate throughout time and across generations.

*30 percent of adults in Cuyahoga County are black and  
74 percent of adults in the County prison system are black.*

The time is NOW to declare racism a public health crisis in our communities. Our citizens of color have been subjected to discrimination, fallen victim to the effects of racism, and endured inadequate housing and unequal and unjust education and health care services for far too long. Our local communities of color are subjected to an increased exposure to lead; poor air quality; lack of safe places to walk, play and run; inadequate health education and poor health outcomes. The United States Office of Disease Prevention recognizes that racism and discrimination negatively impact health outcomes. The American Academy of Pediatrics has outlined clearly the impact of racism on child and adolescent health.

*"It's very uncomfortable to acknowledge racism directly,  
and to bear witness to the role it has in weakening the  
fabric of our society in so many ways, its impact on  
inequity in infant mortality just one example."*

— American Academy of Pediatrics —

It is imperative for local, state and federal elected officials to address racism on several levels, with one of them being the clear and definite assertion that racism is a public health crisis affecting our communities, states and society. By declaring racism a public health crisis, it will be incumbent upon all of us to work together to create equitable and just public health and government systems that are dedicated to increasing diversity and to incorporating anti-racism principles within elected officials, leadership, hiring and promotions, and contracting with vendors.

## WE MUST ACT NOW

The public health crisis we are facing is a problem that we must work to remedy immediately.

This is not just a governmental issue. Action must occur on several different levels in order for change to be realized:

- an individual level
- an organizational level
- a community level
- and a legislative level

Today, working together, we see some anti-racism interventions being led with impactful activities such as Racial Equity and Inclusion training; bias testing to understand one's own biases; Cook Ross Bias in the Workplace training; learning from the local film "TOXIC: A Black Woman's Story"; and workplace bias training, coaching and mentoring. In addition, we have some organizations leading the way in integrating an equity lens to internal hiring and promotions policies, vendor selection and board recruitment activities.

**It is time now for our community to execute a public policy intervention with our local elected officials Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis.** This will be an official pathway for government entities to acknowledge and address the negative economic, cultural, emotional and physical hardships brought on by 400 years of slavery and oppression. When local, state and federal governments declare racism a public health crisis, they are then able to acknowledge the past wrongs of racism and are able to direct tangible human and capital resources to resolve the crisis with the support of many community partners and allies.

FOUNDING MEMBERS



(over)

(continued)

## ACTIONS TAKEN TO DATE

A number of activities have taken place to date to move this initiative forward:

- The 400 Years of Inequity Summit was held in November, 2019, at Cleveland Public Auditorium with nearly 600 attendees committed to eliminating racial disparities. The Summit memorialized the legacy of slavery, connected the history to modern day racial inequities and outlined the tools required to move local governments to action toward a more equitable future.
- In January 2020, a group of local leaders were invited to present to Cleveland City Council's Health and Human Services Committee in support of the Declaration of Racism as a Public Health Crisis. Key presenters included the YWCA Greater Cleveland, The Urban League, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), First Year Cleveland, Birthing Beautiful Communities and United Way of Greater Cleveland.
- The above stakeholders, Cleveland State University and others will continue to work with Cleveland City Council to design and execute the declaration.
- Efforts to educate and inspire other public health officials such as the Health Commissioner for Franklin County Public Health and the President and CEO of National Institute for Children's Health Quality to recognize the adverse effects of racism and join a growing body of officials willing to declare racism a public health crisis are continuing.
- In addition, many local organizations, health care centers, nonprofits and corporations have begun to take steps to apply an equity lens to their operations.

We applaud these efforts and look forward to increased adoption of this initiative.

## OTHER COMMUNITIES DECLARING RACISM A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

Wisconsin	Board of Health for City of Madison and Dane County	December 2018	Board of Health Resolution
	Milwaukee County	May 2019	County-Wide Resolution
	City of Milwaukee	July 2019	City-Wide Resolution
	Madison City	October 2019	City-Wide Resolution
Illinois	Cook County	July 2019	County-Wide Resolution
Missouri	Kansas City	August 2019	City-Wide Resolution
Pennsylvania	Pittsburgh	December 2019	City-Wide Resolution
Arizona		Introduced February 3, 2020	State-Wide Resolution

### WHAT IS PUBLIC HEALTH?

"Public health is defined as 'the art and science of preventing disease, prolonging life and promoting health through the organized efforts of society.' Activities to strengthen public health capacities and service aim to provide conditions under which people can maintain to be healthy, improve their health and well-being, or prevent the deterioration of their health." (WHO)

*In Cuyahoga County, white residents are likely to live nearly six years longer, on average, than African Americans.*

### WHAT WILL BE DIFFERENT IF THE DECLARATION IS PASSED?

By declaring racism a public health crisis, we acknowledge that racism impacts all members of our society and deserves action from all levels of government. Examples of possible actions resulting from this declaration may include:

- Establishing a glossary of terms and definitions concerning racism and health equity;
- Incorporating educational efforts to address and dismantle racism, and expand understanding of racism and how racism affects individual and population health;
- Promoting community engagement, actively engaging citizens on issues of racism, and providing tools to engage actively and authentically with communities of color;
- Committing to review all portions of codified ordinances with a racial equity lens;
- Committing to conduct all human resources, vendor selection and grant management activities with a racial equity lens including reviewing all internal policies and practices such as hiring, promotions, leadership appointments and funding;
- Promoting racially equitable economic and workforce development practices;
- Promoting and encouraging all policies that prioritize the health of people of color and mitigating exposure to adverse childhood experience and trauma in childhood;
- Training of all elected officials, staff, funders and grantees on workplace biases and how to mitigate them;
- Partnering and building alliances with local organizations that have a legacy and track record of confronting racism;
- Encouraging community partners and stakeholders in the education, employment, housing, criminal justice and safety arenas to recognize racism as a public health crisis and to activate the above items;
- Identifying clear goals and objectives, including specific benchmarks, to assess progress and capitalize on opportunities to further advance racial equity; and
- Securing adequate resources to successfully accomplish the above activities.