

In Support of Designating Racism as a Public Health Emergency

The Minneapolis Health Department joins with our national colleagues in local public health in supporting the incorporation and adoption of the principle of social justice into every aspect of public health practice in order to illuminate the root causes of health inequities. (1) The World Health Organization's Commission on Social Determinants of Health's final report states that "social justice is a matter of life and death. It affects the way people live, their consequent chance of illness and their risk of premature death". It recommends that "governments tackle the equitable distribution of money, power and resources."

The impact of historical racism as seen in today's political and social institutions and systems impacts economic security, education, access to quality housing, access to nutritious food and the resulting health outcomes. We must act as anti-racists in order to change our political and social institutions and systems so that all people can be served well by them and have equal opportunities to influence them.

The impact of racism can be seen even before birth. Research has shown a significant relationship between the stresses of racism and low birth weight outcomes. (2) Racism contributes to disproportional exposure to violence or threat of violence, both of which can have long term and latent consequences. (3) In 2020 we are witnessing with clarity the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 in BIPOC communities, demonstrating once again the ongoing pattern of structural racism on health and the interconnection of our collective health and wellbeing.

By declaring racism a public health emergency, we call for an approach that coordinates many sectors and disciplines, that promotes collective action, and is driven by both quantitative data and the voices and know-how of community members and leaders. It commits us to systemic change that comes from self-evaluation. A public health approach operates from the belief that we can prevent problems. In this case we must undo years, decades, and centuries of injustices in order to prevent future harm.

An emergency calls us to urgent action. We must not only not be racist and remove racism from our organizations and institutions, we must be anti-racists - working to reverse the foundational harms that persistently result in health inequities.

There is a readiness for significant change. Using a public health approach, in collaboration with communities, we can respond to that readiness and make measurable progress towards a more just society.



City of Minneapolis, Commissioner of Health

July 9, 2020

- 1) NACCHO Policy Statement on Health Equity and Social Justice
- 2) Collins, J, W. Jr, David R. W., Handler, A., Wall S., and Andes S. (December 2004). Very low birthweight in African American infants: The role of maternal exposure to interpersonal racial discrimination *American Journal of Public Health*, 94(12):2132-2138.
- 3) Haegerich, T. M. & Dahlberg, L. L. (2011). Violence as a public health risk. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, 5(5), 392-406.