

Resolution

By the Washington State Public Health Association

That Racism is a Public Health Crisis in Washington State

PREAMBLE

The Washington State Public Health Association (WSPHA) honors the Indigenous peoples as the original caretakers of the land in their traditional territories. As we gather on the land of the Pacific Northwest Coastal Salish and Plateau Tribes in our work across the state, we honor their ancestors and the generations that have and will follow. We acknowledge the American history of genocide and settler colonialism that attempted to erase Indigenous people with a devastating effect on the health and well-being of Indigenous people here and across the country. Our acknowledgement demonstrates a commitment to the process of dismantling the ongoing legacies of settler colonialism. We support tribal sovereignty, self-determination, and upholding government-to-government relationships.

WSPHA acknowledges the effect of white supremacy and institutional racism on health status resulting in inequities of higher rates of morbidity and mortality among Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) populations. We define white supremacy as the belief that white people are a superior race to the point of it being detrimental to other racial or ethnic groups. While white supremacy is not as overt as it was in America decades ago, many of the systems it installed are still in place and causing harm to others. Because of the pervasive nature of racism, and its ability to negatively impact everyone, we intentionally decided to lead with race. These practices, and their negative impacts on the social determinants of health, have resulted in lost opportunities for BIPOC. Besides race, we recognize that bigotry exists for LGBTQIA, disabled, and religious individuals and that these bigotries have resulted in inequities and trauma. By centering on racism, we are not ignoring these other forms of oppression, but WSPHA is dedicated to eliminating all aspects of bigotry.

Written histories and other narratives are narrow in perspective, ignore and diminish the stories of BIPOC. Failure to recognize these truths and to acknowledge historical traumas, perpetuates the walls that prevent BIPOC communities from achieving optimal health. Health cannot just be absence of disease, but whole person well-being. People are not whole without their stories, their culture, and their history. Racism robs them of their past, makes them invisible, and steals their health.

Washington State, much like the rest of our country, is at a pivotal point. Structural and institutional racism exist and persist here, and we must take a new path by asking ourselves, "How is racism manifested in our health systems, structures, and public health frameworks?"

Racism has led to distrust in our communities amongst BIPOC. This has resulted in BIPOC distrusting healthcare, police, programs and services, and government. This weighs heavily upon us, as the public health system, and we must raise our voice to this failure.

We acknowledge Black Lives Matter. We stand with them in their struggle and support their courage to stay the course to overcome institutional and structural racism.

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We recognize the history of genocide and intergenerational trauma that have had devastating effects among BIPOC communities. We acknowledge that BIPOC cultures have been marginalized and devalued through misappropriation, exploitation, discriminatory practices, and structuralized racism.

And as the organization that represents the interests of health throughout Washington State, we must take a stand: a stand that is clear, substantive, and strong. The time is now.

We encourage others to join us as we take action to turn the tide against racism, support resilience to those effected populations, and overturn inequities.

We must seek healing with the cultures that have been trampled upon. Those cultures have a deep understanding of health, an understanding that is of benefit to all. Culture is critical to maintain good health.

Together we must dismantle and deconstruct dominant systems of power and oppression, and with all communities, innovate and construct a healing and equitable future.

BIPOC communities have the knowledge and understanding of their communities to determine the most effective solutions. White people cannot affect this future without BIPOC, and just because BIPOC are "at the table" is not good enough. Power must be shared and freely given for genuine change.

We commit to being reflective and spending genuine time together. We commit to putting our entire selves to this work and we ask that others commit themselves as well. We will strive to be part of the solution of healing in our commitment to health equity, knowing it is only achieved when all people can reach their full potential, and are not disadvantaged by social or economic class, race, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, or socially determined circumstance.

Unclean water, prevalence of commercial tobacco, and the spread of communicable disease mobilized public health to protect their communities by reducing illness and premature death through education and policy. Public health must once again step forward with equal vigor to address racism and health inequities. We must fundamentally change public health if we are going to have a healthy Washington for all.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the deaths of Black/African people across the United States have sounded the alarm that racism remains ingrained and persistent throughout our institutions and society; and

WHEREAS, racism is not random, it was intentionally created and is intentionally sustained; and

WHEREAS, race is a social construction with no biological basis, designed to control and disparage people of non-European ancestry; and

WHEREAS, the [American Public Health Association](#) (APHA) states racism is a driving force of the social determinants of health and is a barrier to health equity; and

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WHEREAS, multiple studies show race, income, and zip code have a bigger impact on health than personal behavior, medical care, or genetic code; and

WHEREAS, racism in Washington State is a source of illness and reduced years of healthy life for BIPOC; and

WHEREAS, a higher percentage of American Indian Alaska Native (AIAN), Hispanic, Black, and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) Washingtonians live in poverty than White Washingtonians; and

WHEREAS, Hispanic Washingtonians have a [higher rate of confirmed COVID-19 cases](#) than Non-Hispanic White Washingtonians; and

WHEREAS, Black Washingtonians have a [significantly higher rate](#) of diabetes compared with White adults; and

WHEREAS, AI/AN adults have [significantly higher rates](#) of respiratory cancer, heart disease, and diabetes compared with White adults; and

WHEREAS, the vision of WSPHA is a healthy Washington for all; and

WHEREAS, the mission of WSPHA is working together to improve the health of all people, places, and communities in Washington; and

WHEREAS, the WSPHA Board of Directors has prioritized Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in its 2020-22 priorities; and

WHEREAS, Health equity only exists when all people have the opportunity to attain their full health potential.

THEREFORE LET IT BE RESOLVED that on February 25, 2022 the Board of the Washington State Public Health Association does hereby declare racism as a public health crisis in Washington State and commits its full attention to these four areas:

ADVOCACY

Strategies

- Adopt and promote anti-racist ideas and organizational values
- Advocate for anti-racist policies and practices
- Identify, raise awareness, and publicize when we see disparities in illness, injury, and premature death among BIPOC
- Support policies that disrupt the school to prison pipeline and advance educational and leadership capacity and positionality of BIPOC as equitable partners and decision-makers
- Advocate for equity of data

Actions

- Campaign for organizations throughout Washington State to declare racism a public health crisis and take steps to dismantle institutional and structural racism

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- Campaign for people, police unions, police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, judges, and district attorneys across Washington State to stand firm against all who would use hate, violence, and intimidation to achieve their ends, whether private citizens or law enforcement officials
- Campaign for all organizations, associations, businesses, and governments to provide education and training on bias, anti-racism, and equity
- Campaign for our schools to teach anti-racist practices and accurate histories of BIPOC
- Campaign for the education system to reform by integrating cultural practices, traditions, and histories
- Campaign for public agencies to collect data accurately and appropriately to assess full health impacts and statuses on BIPOC
- Campaign for governmental jurisdictions to prioritize programs dismantling systemic racism, and economic and racial inequalities and away from imprisonment and incarceration systems
- Campaign for voting rights, and equitable and transparent redistricting processes

EDUCATION

Strategies

- Be a resource to communities and organizations considering or pursuing anti-racist objectives
- Be a conduit for appropriate, accurate, and effective information by educating ourselves on the history and legacy of colonialism

Actions

- Maintain external facing resources that accurately describe and account for racism's impact on the public's health
- Maintain resources for organizations interested in moving in an anti-racist direction and increasing diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Conduct educational webinars and workshops on racism and equity

ALLYSHIP

Strategies

- Stand in solidarity with people raising their voice to eliminate racism
- Align our actions and resources with eliminating racism
- Align with partners to fight against white supremacy and institutional racism in the field of public health

Actions

- Sign onto petitions and letters identifying racism as a public health crisis and support diversity, equity, and inclusion
- When invited or appropriate, participate with BIPOC communities on actions supporting health, anti-racism, diversity, equity, and inclusion

ACCOUNTABILITY

Strategies

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- Share power and work side by side with anti-racist organizations

Actions

- Map out a diversity, equity, and inclusion initiative that will:
 - Center the question, “Where is racism manifested?” in our systems, processes, committees, and convenings
 - Identify and dismantle the barriers created by these systems and work to undo the ways it manifests in our own organization
 - Recruit and sustain a diverse Board of Directors and staff that reflects our communities
 - Foster a diverse membership