



Buncombe County Health and Human Services

Public Assistance & Work Support Strategies ~ Public Health ~ Social Work Services ~ Veterans Services

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HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES BOARD DECLARING RACISM A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

WHEREAS, public health is defined as “the science and art of preventing disease”, prolonging and improving life through organized efforts and informed choices of society, organizations, public and private, communities, and individualsⁱ; and

WHEREAS, public health’s responsibilities to address racism include reshaping our discourse and agenda so that we all actively engage in racial justice work; and

WHEREAS, racism causes persistent racial discrimination influencing many areas of life, including housing, education, employment and criminal justice; and an emerging body of research demonstrates that racism itself is a social determinant of health ⁱⁱ; and

WHEREAS, more than 100 studies have linked racism to worse health outcomesⁱⁱⁱ; and

WHEREAS, the American Public Health Association (APHA) launched a National Campaign Against Racism^{iv}; and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Public Health Association (NCPHA) recognizes the broad public health impacts of systemic racism and if we are to advance public health in our state and around the country, we must continue to work together to address these underlying issues^v; and

WHEREAS, the NC Institute for Medicine, Healthy NC 2030 Report (HNC2030), notes “the root cause for the health disparities we see in populations of color is the historical and continued structural racism that has resulted in inequitable opportunities for healthy lives^{vi}.” In Buncombe County, 20.64 percent of White homeowners experience housing cost burden, while 39.4 percent of Black homeowners experience cost burden^{vii}. Similarly, in our county, 12 percent of white children compared to 24 percent of Black children, and 40 percent of Hispanic children live in poverty^{viii}. Further, in Buncombe County, Blacks make up 21 percent of the jail population, yet make up only 6.4 percent of the local population^{ix}; and

WHEREAS, The Buncombe County 2018 Community Health Assessment notes, Black babies are 3.8 times more likely to die in the first year of life than white babies, and where life expectancy is 4 years shorter for Black residents when compared to white residents^x; and

WHEREAS, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners 2020-2025 Strategic Plan identifies equity as a foundational focus area with a commitment to systems, policies, and practices that support equity for all people and an organizational culture that embraces diversity and inclusion; and

WHEREAS, Buncombe County HHS Board acknowledges that the health impact of racism in North Carolina and Buncombe County is a crisis and rises to the definition proposed by Dr. Sandro Galea who notes: “The problem must affect large numbers of people, it must threaten health over the long-term, and it must require the adoption of large scale solutions^{xi}”; and

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that Buncombe County Health & Human Services and Board will:

1. Assert that racism is a public health crisis affecting our entire community;
2. In collaboration with BCHHS Executive Staff, Senior Staff and the Buncombe County Equity and Inclusion Workgroup, conduct an assessment of internal policy and procedures and make recommendations to the County Manager and Board of Commissions of changes needed to ensure racial equity is a core element of BCHHS;
3. In collaboration with BCHHS Executive Staff, Senior Staff and the Buncombe County Equity and Inclusion Workgroup conduct an assessment and make recommendations to the County Manager and Board of Commissioners of changes needed to insure that BCHHS is an equity and justice-oriented organization, with the BCHHS and Senior Staff identifying specific activities to embrace diversity and to incorporate antiracism principles across BCHHS, leadership, staffing and contracting;
4. In collaboration with BCHHS Executive Staff, Senior Staff and the Buncombe County Equity and Inclusion Workgroup conduct an assessment and make recommendations to the County Manager and Board of Commissioners of changes needed to incorporate into the organizational structure a plan for educational efforts to understand, address and dismantle racism, in order to undo how racism affects individual and population health and provide tools to assist BCHHS staff, contractors, and its jurisdictions on how to engage actively and authentically with communities of color; advocate for relevant policies that improve health in communities of color, and support local, state, regional, and federal initiatives that advance efforts to dismantle systemic racism;
5. Continually assess and revise all portions of codified health regulations through a racial equity lens;
6. In collaboration with BCHHS Executive Staff, Senior Staff and the Buncombe County Equity and Inclusion Workgroup conduct an assessment and make recommendations to the County Manager and Board of Commissioners of changes needed to insure that all human resources, vendor selection and grant management activities are conducted with a racial equity lens including reviewing all internal policies and practices such as hiring, promotions, leadership appointments and funding;

7. To always promote and support all policies that prioritize the health of all people, especially people of color by mitigating exposure to adverse childhood experiences, trauma in childhood and ensuring implementation of Health and Equity in All Policies;
8. Partner and build alliances with local organizations that have a legacy and track record of confronting racism;
9. Identify clear goals and objectives, including specific benchmarks, to assess progress and capitalize on opportunities to further advance racial equity, aligning measures with indicators identified in the Healthy NC 2030 Report; and
10. Establish alliances and secure adequate resources for successful accomplishment of the above activities.

Fiscal Impact: The BCHHS Board will advocate for allocations in the organization's budget that provide adequate financial resources to accomplish these activities.

Adopted at the Buncombe County Health & Human Services Board Meeting on June, 26, 2020.



Chairperson, Buncombe County HHS Board

References

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- ⁱ Winslow, Charles-Edward Amory (1920). The Untilled Fields of Public Health. Science, 51, 23-33.
 - ⁱⁱ Flynn, A., Holmberg, S., Warren, D., and Wong, F. REWRITE the Racial Rules: Building an Inclusive American Economy. Roosevelt Institute, 2016.
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Institute of Medicine. Unequal Treatment. <https://www.nap.edu/read/10260/chapter/2#7>. Accessed 3/2/2018.
 - ^{iv} American Public Health Association. Racism and Health. Available at: <https://www.apha.org/topics-and-issues/health-equity/racism-and-health> . Accessed June 12, 2020.
 - ^v North Carolina Public Health Association. Statement from NCPHA regarding the Public Health Crises in our Nation. Available at: <https://ncpha.memberclicks.net/> Accessed June 15, 2020.
 - ^{vi} North Carolina Institute of Medicine. Healthy North Carolina 2030: A Path Toward Health. Morrisville, NC: North Carolina Institute of Medicine; 2020.
 - ^{vii} National Equity Index. Available at: <https://nationalequityatlas.org/indicators> Accessed: 6/17/2020
 - ^{viii} County Health Rankings. Available at: <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/north-carolina/2020/rankings/buncombe/county/outcomes/overall/snapshot> Accessed 6/17/2020
 - ^{ix} Buncombe County Justice Resource Advisory Council. Available at: <https://www.buncombecounty.org/common/jrac/safety-justice-challenge/factsheet.pdf> Accessed: 6/17/2020
 - ^x North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics (SCHS). Nov. 2019. Available at: <https://schs.dph.ncdhhs.gov/data/lifexpectancy> . Accessed 6/12/2020.
 - ^{xi} Galea, Sandro. Crying "Crisis". Dean's Note. Boston University School of Public Health. Available at: <https://www.bu.edu.sph/2017/04/23/crying-crisis/>. Adapted from: Wisconsin Public Health Association. Racism Declaration. Available at: https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.wpha.org/resource/resmgr/2018_folder/WPHA_Racial_Equity_Resolutio. Accessed: 6/10/2020.

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