

Resolution 2020: Racism is a Public Health Crisis

WHEREAS, race is a social construction with no biologic basis¹; and

WHEREAS, racism is a social system with multiple dimensions: individual racism is internalized or interpersonal; and systemic racism is institutional or structural, and is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks, that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources ^{2,3}; and

WHEREAS, racism causes persistent racial discrimination in housing, education, employment and criminal justice; and an emerging body of research demonstrates that racism is a social determinant of health^{1,4}; and

WHEREAS, more than 100 studies have linked racism to worse health outcomes ⁵; and

WHEREAS, in Genesee County, the highest excess death rates exist for African American, at every stage in the life course and our infant mortality rate for infants of non- Hispanic black women is almost twice that of white women ⁶; and

WHEREAS, the American Public Health Association (APHA) launched a National Campaign Against Racism ³; and

WHEREAS, the goal of the Genesee County Health Department is to improve the health status of Genesee County residents, with particular attention to eliminating racial, social, and economic inequities and using prevention and intervention strategies that target underlying causes; ⁷; and

WHEREAS, Genesee County has adopted in 2016 the resolution promoting a Health Equity in all Policies (HEIAP) Framework to Guide Policy Making” which is used strategically to promote health and racial equity ⁸; 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, while there is no epidemiologic definition of “crisis”, the health impact of racism clearly rises to the definition proposed by Galea: “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”.⁹

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Genesee County Board of Health (GCBOH):

1. Asserts that racism is a public health crisis affecting our entire society
2. Conducts an assessment of internal policy and procedures to ensure racial equity is a core element of the GCBOH and promote and advocate in all Genesee County departments

3. Works to create an equity and justice-oriented organization,¹⁰ with the Board and Committees identifying specific activities to increase diversity and to incorporate anti-racism principles across GCBOH membership, leadership, staffing and contracting
4. Incorporates into the organizational workplan educational efforts to address and dismantle racism, expand members' understanding of racism, and how racism affects individual and population health and provide tools to assist members to engage actively and authentically with communities of color
5. Advocates for relevant policies that improve health in communities of color, and supports local, state, and federal initiatives that advance social justice, while also encouraging individual member advocacy to dismantle systemic racism
6. Works to build alliances and partnerships with other organizations that are confronting racism and encourages other local, state and national entities to recognize racism as a public health crisis

Fiscal impact: The GCBOH will consider in the organization's budget allocating adequate financial resources to accomplish these activities.

References:

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