



Racism is a Public Health Crisis in Wisconsin

Background

Years of work led by grassroots groups, community-based organizations, government agencies, academic leaders, and many others have laid a strong foundation to address racial inequities in Wisconsin. In October 2017, the Mobilizing Action Toward Community Health (MATCH) Group, of the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute, convened statewide partners at the inaugural Healthiest State Agenda Setting Meeting. The convening supported the collective identification of six statewide health equity priorities, one of which was to declare racism a public health emergency. In May 2018, the [Wisconsin Public Health Association \(WPHA\) passed a resolution](#) declaring that racism is a public health crisis in Wisconsin and committed to taking action. Building on this work, several partner organizations have worked together to transfer the WPHA resolution content to this Racism is a Public Health Crisis Sign-on. The goal is for organizations and individuals to [sign-on to the declaration](#) and commit to actions that are tailored to their specific contexts.

Visit the [Racism is a Public Health Crisis in Wisconsin page](#) for more information about this effort, to view the [current list of organizational signers](#), and to [sign-on](#).

Declaration

(See the [WPHA Resolution](#) for full declaration and citations.)

We agree that Racism is a Public Health Crisis and commit to take urgent action because:

- Race is a social construction with no biological basis.
- 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.
- 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.
- More than 100 studies have linked racism to worse health outcomes.
- In Wisconsin, the highest excess death rates exist for African Americans and Native Americans at every stage in the life course and our infant mortality rate for infants of non-Hispanic black women is the highest in the nation.
- The American Public Health Association (APHA) launched a National Campaign Against Racism.
- Healthiest Wisconsin 2020 states that, "Wisconsin must address persistent disparities in health outcomes and the social, economic, educational and environmental inequities that contribute to them."
- Public health's responsibilities to address racism include reshaping our discourse and agenda so that we all actively engage in racial justice work.
- While there is no epidemiological 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."

Take Action

As an organization or coalition, in order to address racism as a public health crisis, we will:

- Publicly assert that racism is a public health crisis affecting our entire society. Conduct an assessment of internal policy and procedures to ensure racial equity is a core element of our work.
- Work to create an equity and justice oriented organization, with staff, and/or other stakeholders identifying specific activities to increase diversity and to incorporate anti-racism principles within leadership, staffing, and contracting.
- Incorporate educational efforts to address and dismantle racism, expand understanding of racism, and how racism affects individual and population health.
- Provide tools to engage actively and authentically with communities of color. Advocate for relevant policies that improve health in communities of color, and support local, state, and federal initiatives that advance social justice, while also encouraging individual advocacy to dismantle systematic racism.
- Work to build alliances and partnerships with other appropriate organizations that are confronting racism and encourage partners and/or stakeholders to recognize racism as a public health crisis.
- Allocate adequate financial and human resources to accomplish all selected activities.
- Other _____.

As an individual, in order to address racism as a public health crisis, I will:

- Engage in ongoing individual self-assessment, reflection, and acknowledgement regarding the role I play and the role I can play.
- Share this information with my friends and colleagues.
- Examine my networks and identify with whom I can work to create change with direct actions.
- Seek out additional training to build an individual growth and learning plan.
- Take the declaration to my organization.
- Commit to self-work and self-care.
- Other _____.

Questions about this effort? Please contact healthieststatewi@wisc.edu.



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