Racism Is a Public Health Crisis

The Healthcare Anchor Network declares it is undeniable.

October 14, 2020

The following is a statement from 39 health systems in 45 states and Washington, DC, which have committed to addressing racism and the public health disparities caused by racism.

As members and leaders of many healthcare organizations across the nation addressing the disproportionate Black and Brown mortality of the COVID-19 pandemic, we say without hesitation that Black Lives Matter.

No person of decency can look at the images of George Floyd's killing without feelings of rage, horror, shame, and grief. The deaths of George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor — and too many others — are unjust and unconscionable.

We must double down on our efforts. Systemic racism poses a real threat to the health of our patients, families, and communities. We stand with all of those who have raised their voices to capture the attention of people across the nation with a clear call for action.

The health systems we represent are deeply woven into the fabric of the communities we serve, live, and work in, and we stand united as frontline organizations against racism, injustice, and inaction.

Systemic racism results in generational trauma and poverty, while also unquestionably causing higher rates of illness and death in Black and Indigenous communities and communities of color. We have seen — in its rawest form — how the trauma of systemic racism adds to the historical injustices that have disproportionately affected communities of color. Health systems across the nation work to provide high-quality, compassionate care in the face of health disparities and poor outcomes resulting from social and economic inequities. In rural areas, where resources are spread out across larger geographies, we have seen healthcare organizations and community partners adapt to the shifting conditions with ingenuity and purpose.

These social determinants of health include poverty, inadequate housing, underperforming schools, police brutality, mass incarceration, food deserts, joblessness and underemployment, poor access to healthcare, and violence. All of these factors contribute to health inequities in our communities. And they serve as a recipe for pain, suffering, premature mortality — and civil unrest.

In our communities, there is also resilience, innovation, a tradition of faith, and a spirit of unity that manages to thrive even under the weight of this systemic burden. Imagine the potential for our communities with dramatically improved social and economic conditions and health outcomes.

It's time to fully realize this potential. It's time for action. We will work more intentionally with community-based partners in building and sustaining the sweeping change that is needed to ensure health equity across the country, and particularly in our most under-resourced communities.

As healthcare organizations, we are committed to being part of the solution, both within our organizations and in partnership with local community groups. We are focused on improving access to care and eliminating systemic racism, which contributes to poor health outcomes.

We have come together as health systems from all across the country as part of the Healthcare Anchor Network, a health system-led collaboration working to improve community health and well-being by leveraging all our assets, including hiring, purchasing, and investment for equitable, local economic impact.

Here are some of the steps we are or will be taking to help overcome the healthcare disparities in the communities we serve:

- COVID-19: We are providing testing and direct care while also partnering with city and county health officials to provide educational programs, services and personal protective equipment to under-resourced communities, and advocacy for personal practices that flatten the curve.
- Inclusive, Local Hiring: We are implementing inclusive, local hiring and workforce development programs to remove barriers and build community hiring pipelines for people of color to find careers in healthcare.
- Inclusive, Local Procurement: We are directing spending to diverse and locally owned vendors and building the capacity of local minority-owned businesses to meet supply chain needs.
- Place-based Investment: We are leveraging investment assets to address the racial, economic, and environmental resource disparities that create poor health outcomes.
- Tracking Progress: We are measuring key processes and outcomes related to inclusive, local hiring, procurement, and place-based investment initiatives with a racial equity lens. We seek to understand this data in order to inform our institution's internal and external response to the inequities embedded in our systems.
- Listening: Many in our organizations are learning about or becoming increasingly aware of the

ways in which systemic racism has impacted our colleagues at work and members of our communities. Our institutions are committed to actively engaging and listening to our patients and colleagues of color, modifying our behavior where needed, and learning from their experiences. We seek to better understand and educate ourselves about this legacy of injustice and the institutional and systemic racism that persists in all areas of our society today. In that process of continuous learning, we can become better allies, advocates, and partners in dismantling systemic racism, evolving our anchor mission approaches appropriately to meet the needs of our communities.

We also are committed to continue working to address racism and the healthcare disparities it creates.

We commit to …

- Re-examine our institutional policies with an equity lens and make policy changes that promote equity and opportunity.
- Improve access to primary and specialty care.
- Continue to focus on helping our communities overcome chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and asthma.
- Continue to advocate for investments that create innovative solutions to achieve enduring improvements in access, quality, and health outcomes for our communities.
- Continue our commitment to hiring locally and promoting and retaining leaders of color.
- Renew and expand our organizations' commitment to providing anti-racism and unconscious bias training for our administrators, physicians, nurses, and staff.
- Advocate for increased funding for social needs, social services, and programs that promote social justice.

Our society only truly thrives when everyone has an opportunity to succeed and live a healthy life. We are committed to moving forward together. By harnessing the collective strengths of our organizations, we will help serve our communities as agents of change.

The healthcare systems that have signed onto this statement are: Advocate Aurora Health, Alameda Health System, AMITA Health, Baystate Health, BJC HealthCare, Bon Secours Mercy Health, Boston Children's Hospital, Boston Medical Center, Children's Hospital of Philadelphia,

ChristianaCare, Cleveland Clinic, CommonSpirit Health, Cone Health, Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health, Denver Health, Einstein Healthcare Network, Franciscan Missionaries Of Our Lady Health System, Gundersen Health System, Kaiser Permanente, Lurie Children's, M Health Fairview, Maimonides Medical Center, Mass General Brigham, Northwell Health, ProMedica, Providence St. Joseph Health, Rush University Medical Center, RWJBarnabas Health, San Mateo County Health, Seattle Children's, Spectrum Health, The MetroHealth System, Trinity Health, UC San Francisco, UMass Memorial Health, University Hospitals, University of Utah Health, VCU Health, and Yale New Haven Health.

This statement was intentionally modeled on the June 19, 2020, statement signed by 30+ Chicago area health institutions and adapted to a national context.

Originally titled "It is undeniable: Racism is a public health crisis," this statement was first published on the Healthcare Anchor Network website.

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