

Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis

WHEREAS, modern day discrimination, including but not limited to discrimination in the form of racism, harms all individuals and communities including, but not limited to, social categories defined by class, gender, ability and race; and

WHEREAS, these social categories do not stand alone but instead are overlapping and interconnected, amplifying discrimination or disadvantage; and

WHEREAS, racism divides humans into distinct groups based on inherent physical traits --- primarily, but not limited to, skin color and/or geographical origins among people of a shared ancestry; and

WHEREAS, racism creates or provides unfair disadvantages to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) individuals and communities and conversely unfair advantages to other individuals or communities; and

WHEREAS, since time immemorial the Suquamish Tribe, the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe and other American Indian tribes, who are independent sovereign nations, have and currently live in Kitsap County. Attempts to assimilate local tribes over time in Kitsap County have brought disease, trauma, racism, and environmental degradation that have disproportionately resulted in poor health outcomes of indigenous persons because of race; and

WHEREAS, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color in the United States of America have disproportionately suffered and continue to experience disadvantages and acts of violence because of their race, or how they look, as compared to white people; and

WHEREAS, the mission statement of the Kitsap Public Health District is to prevent disease and promote the health of all persons in Kitsap County and it is our belief that all Kitsap residents should have an equal opportunity to live healthy and safe lives, and this includes addressing issues and health outcomes due to race; and

WHEREAS, maintaining the status quo and existing systems of power and white privilege, based on our country's long history, results in the persistence of inequities, institutional policies and practices do not need to be explicitly racist in order to have racist impacts on residents; and

WHEREAS, due to existing systemic racism and the resulting socioeconomic inequities, COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on our Black, Indigenous, and People of Color communities; and

WHEREAS, the continued violence against BIPOC individuals and communities are present-day demonstrations of the systemic racism in institutions that have not valued and supported human life equitably; and

WHEREAS, Kitsap County public health data demonstrate persistent differences across multiple key indicators, including:

- Socioeconomic Status – median household income for American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx and Multi-racial households is at least \$10,000 below that of White, Non-Hispanics;
- Education – high school graduation rates are at least 5 percentage points lower for Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander students compared to White, Non-Hispanics; the percentage of students entering kindergarten ready to learn is at least 14 percentage points lower for American Indian/Alaska Native, Black/African American, Hispanic/Latinx and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander children compared to White, Non-Hispanics; and
- Health Care Access – approximately 7 of 10 Hispanic/Latina and Black/African American pregnant women access prenatal care in the first trimester compared to about 8 out of 10 White, Non-Hispanics; and
- Health Outcomes – infant mortality is 1.8 times higher amongst non-white babies compared to White, Non-Hispanic babies; and life expectancy for Black, Non-Hispanics is 5 years lower than White, Non-Hispanics; and

WHEREAS, the current COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated racial disparities within Kitsap County's communities of color. COVID-19 infections have been more prevalent amongst communities of color, 36% of cases, and more severe, 40% of hospitalizations, while communities of color make up 25% of the total Kitsap population. Compared to Whites, COVID-19 vaccination initiation rates are lower amongst Asians, Black/African Americans, and Hispanic/Latinx; and

WHEREAS, Kitsap Public Health District has expressed a commitment to developing stronger and better resourced partnerships with community organizations and leaders to disrupt and dismantle racism and protect the health and well-being of our residents of color, using quantitative data about racial inequities, along with voices and knowledge of community leaders and residents to get to solutions that work and that are sustainable; and

WHEREAS, Kitsap Public Health District recognizes the historical perpetuation of structural racism and as an institution the Kitsap Public Health Board stands in support of dismantling oppressive systems that contribute to racial inequities.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Kitsap Public Health Board declares racism a public health crisis and commits to a course of action that reduces, and ultimately

eliminates, health disparities so that optimal health for all is possible and race no longer predicts health outcomes in Kitsap County. The Board and the Kitsap Public Health District commit to work to advance a public health approach in addressing institutional and systemic racism; including but not limited to:

- Ongoing review of existing policies and procedures to address and reform structures and processes that contribute to race-based decisions and actions.
- Ongoing review of programs and services through a racial justice and equity lens, using tools such as those developed by the Government Alliance for Race and Equity, to identify and implement changes to ensure equity within programs regardless of race. Programs will be encouraged to include activities that address equity into their yearly workplans.
- A commitment to apply strategies for recruiting and hiring a workforce that reflects the demographic, cultural and linguistic characteristics of the populations it serves.
- An all-staff professional development program that includes training on core competencies in health equity, cultural competency, and anti-racism.
- Establishing an internal equity committee, consisting of staff from all Kitsap Public Health District divisions, whose primary purpose will be to make recommendations regarding and help facilitate implementation of equity plans and activities.
- Sustaining a Community Liaison staff position with a focus on equity, who will be dedicated to conducting outreach to, and receiving feedback from, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color and other communities facing health inequities.
- Partnering with community to co-create solutions to address structural inequities.
- Promoting policy and system level changes within Kitsap County to move beyond equity only and undo racist structures.
- Board members commit to consulting with Tribal governments on a government-to-government basis to further understand tribal history and culture, cultural competency, and indigenous practices tied to health outcomes to incorporate that knowledge in Kitsap Public Health District's policies to improve the well-being and future public health of Tribal peoples and Black, Indigenous, and People of Color.
- Board members commit to taking a stand for nonviolence and inclusion in our communities, and for environmental restoration throughout Kitsap County.

APPROVED: May 4, 2021



Commissioner Charlotte Garrido, Chair
Kitsap Public Health Board