

RESOLUTION 2020-4648

A RESOLUTION OF THE TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH, PIERCE COUNTY, WASHINGTON, DECLARING RACISM A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS AND DIRECTING THE HEALTH DEPARTMENT TO TAKE SPECIFIC ACTIONS

WHEREAS, racism is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks (which we call "race"), that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities and unfairly advantages other individuals and communities; and

WHEREAS, the health impacts of racism clearly exemplify the definition of public health crisis proposed by the Boston University School of Public Health, which is that "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"; and

WHEREAS, businesses, healthcare providers, and government agencies have structures built on past overt racist policies, long standing and unquestioned for so long, they have the effect of disadvantaging groups of people based on their race; and

WHEREAS, these structures of racism built into our education, employment, real estate, healthcare, law enforcement, judicial, and behavioral health systems have resulted in persistent negative and disproportional effects on Black/African American and other people of color; and

WHEREAS, the deaths of Black/African American people across the United States, including the recent deaths of Manuel Ellis, Said Joquin, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and countless others both within Pierce County and across the nation have contributed to an environment that is persistently unsafe for our Black/African American communities; and

WHEREAS, multiple studies show race, income, and zip code have a bigger impact on health than personal behavior, medical care, or genetic code; and

WHEREAS, the documented unjustified deaths of people of color across the United States have led to increasing public awareness, particularly within white communities, of inappropriate tactical engagement strategies, and of historic and ongoing systemic racism that harms all people of color but more so and most persistently black people; and

WHEREAS, The Institute of Medicine concludes in Unequal Treatment, 2003 "The majority of studies... find that racial and ethnic disparities remain even after controlling for socioeconomic differences and other health care access factors."; and

WHEREAS: "Evidence continues to accumulate, highlighting racism as a driver of multiple upstream societal factors that perpetuate racial inequities in health...", as outlined in "Racism and Health: Evidence and Needed Research", April 2019; and

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WHEREAS, Black/African Americans in Pierce County have significantly higher rates of death for cancer, diabetes, pregnancy-related conditions, and homicide compared to White residents; and

WHEREAS, Black/African Americans in Pierce County average 3.5 years less of life expectancy than Whites; and

WHEREAS, strong research ties the stress of daily racism to poor infant health outcomes, and Black/African American infants in Pierce County are 2.1 times more likely to die than White infants; and

WHEREAS, the current COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the racial disparities within Pierce County's Black, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, Latinx, and American Indian/Alaskan Native communities; and

WHEREAS, the cumulative result of these racist systems and structures has contributed to an environment that is persistently unhealthy and unsafe for our Black/African American communities and for people of color; and

WHEREAS, unfair and race-based inequities will continue unless we undertake the uncomfortable but necessary work to dismantle the institutions and systems that perpetuate racism, violence, poverty, and injustice; and

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:

Tacoma-Pierce County Board of Health declares racism is a public health crisis and charges the Health Department to:

- Assess internal policies and procedures to address and reform structures and processes that contribute to race based decisions and actions.
- Reshape our discourse and agenda so we all actively engage in anti-racist work, particularly anti-black racism.
- Review our budget and make recommendations for funding changes, allocations or re-allocations that fund the work of transforming systemic racism as a means of resolving disparities by changing the systems that cause them.
- Partner with community to co-create solutions.
- Promote policy and system level changes within Pierce County to move beyond equity only and undo racist structures.

Tacoma-Pierce County

Board of Health



TACOMA-PIERCE COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH

Catherine Ushka
Chair, Board of Health

June 17, 2020
Date of Adoption

ATTEST:

Patricia Darden
Clerk, Board of Health