

Greater Rochester Black Agenda Group

DECLARATION: “RACISM IS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS” | May 19, 2020

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

- Race is a social construct with no biological basis.
- Racism is a system that creates structures of opportunity and assigns value based on the social interpretation of how one looks, that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, while unfairly providing advantages to 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, health care, employment, criminal justice, business, and economic mobility. There is an emerging body of research that demonstrates racism as a social determinant of health.
- Racial health disparities in the Black Community have existed since racial health data has been collected and analyzed. Racial health disparities in diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and mental health are prevalent and growing.
- Moreover, in Rochester and Monroe County, the persistent toxic stress of racism expressed as racial and ethnic discrimination impacts health through a combination of social-emotional and physiological effects. Researchers have found higher levels of stress hormones (allostatic loads) as an indicator of premature aging and death.¹
- Of all the ways racial health disparities impact our life course and trajectory (path) the most profound is in Infant Mortality. African American babies in Monroe County die at 3-4 times the rate of white babies. This is a statistic that has not changed in many years and is trending in the wrong direction.²
- Public health’s responsibilities to address racism include reshaping our discourse and agenda so that we all actively engage in anti-racist and 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.”
- *“No one is born racist; it is modeled, learned, and passed along through generations where it poisons and paralyzes its victims and corrupts its perpetrators. If we are to eradicate this persistent evil we must see to its structural and institutional roots. And with swift and collective action hold those that govern and that are governed accountable for its elimination.”*
- Dr. Joy DeGruy

¹ McEwen, C., McEwen, B. Social Structure, Adversity, Toxic Stress, and Intergenerational Poverty: An Early Childhood Model. *Annu Rev Sociol.* 2017; 43: 445-472.

² Vital Records data NYSDOH, Analyzed by MCDPH, 2014-2016