



The Washington State Board of Health (Board) recognizes racism is a public health crisis. Each day more Black lives are lost, and families and communities of color are torn apart and devastated by police violence. Black lives matter. We believe Black futures matter. Systemic and institutional racism is a barrier for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color that extends beyond police brutality to the health and wellness of our communities.

We know that high-quality health care and education, food security, justice and a living wage are necessary for optimal health. But inequities persist because racism creates barriers to accessing these basic needs. The Board acknowledges racism disproportionately impacts Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Racism has prevented communities of color from thriving and achieving their optimal health for centuries.

The Board completes Health Impact Reviews in collaboration with the Governor's Interagency Council on Health Disparities. This work demonstrates how state policy decisions and legislation impact health and equity. Reviews identify the scientific evidence that demonstrate the impacts policy decisions have on the people in our state, and shows disparities are consistently found among people of color and other historically marginalized communities. Reviews identify systemic barriers in all sectors, including education, the justice system, housing, transportation, health care, and employment.

It is not enough to review the research and acknowledge the health effects of racism. The Board has a duty to look inward to identify and understand how our actions and our work contribute to and exacerbate systemic and institutional racism. We cannot do this work alone. The Board commits to listening to, learning from, and partnering with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color-led organizations to dismantle institutional racism and improve diversity, equity, and inclusion within our Board. By collaboratively identifying a path forward, we will be better equipped to advance racial and social justice within our own scope of work.

The Board believes dismantling institutional racism in every sector of state government is long-over-due, and must be a priority for all agencies. In the 2020 legislative session, the legislature passed a bill creating the Office of Equity, which was not funded. We believe a state Office of Equity is essential to assist agencies in identifying and implementing effective strategies to eliminate systemic and institutional racism and inequities. Now, more than ever, this Office should be adequately funded to do this important work.

The Board believes that all government agencies have a duty to center equity in daily work and actively identify and dismantle racism. We must meaningfully engage the people we serve. This is critical work that must be sustained to protect and improve the health and well-being of all people in Washington state.

