Talking Points
Declare Racism a Public Health Crisis

First, Find and Highlight Local Data on Health Equity

Before reaching out to partners and city leaders, consider looking into disparities in social and health outcomes specific to your city/county.

Look through your local community health needs assessment. Try this Google Search: [CITY/COUNTY community health needs assessment].

Look through reports, maps and/or dashboards published by your local health department. Try this Google Search: [CITY/COUNTY health department report/dashboard/map disparities].

Look for reports published by local institutions, organizations and foundations on some of the following: community health, health disparities, diabetes, heart disease, depression, suicide, life expectancy, adverse childhood experiences, poverty, income inequality, housing affordability, transportation affordability, food insecurity, high school graduation rates, domestic violence, and incarceration rates.

Find out if your city has a map of previously redlined neighborhoods.

Download S*alud America!*'s Health Equity Report Card for your county. You'll see local maps, gauges, and data that reveal place-based inequities in housing, transportation, education, food, environmental issues, socioeconomic status, health outcomes and more.

You can also email us to help you find more relevant data. saludamerica@uthscsa.edu

Describe Disparities in Health

Disparities in health are well-documented between whites and Blacks, Latinos, and other people of color.

- Latinos are nearly 1.5 times more likely to die from [diabetes or liver disease](#) than whites.
- Blacks are twice as likely to die from [heart disease](#) than whites.
- COVID-19 is killing Blacks at 2.4 times the rate of whites.
- Racism is a risk factor for [toxic stress](#), a root cause of some of the most harmful, persistent and expensive health challenges facing our nation. Experiencing racism can increase stress hormones which, without buffering care, can lead to activation of the immune and inflammatory systems; changes in brain structure; elevation of blood pressure and blood sugar; and changes in how genes are read. These biological processes are associated with increased risk for numerous mental and physical chronic health conditions, like heart disease, cancer, asthma, stroke, and suicide.
- Blacks, Latinos, and other people of color are dying at higher rates because systemic racial injustices created social inequities in housing, transportation, education, healthcare, and public safety.

Describe Disparities in Social Outcomes

We cannot begin to address the health issues that threaten Black and Latino lives unless we are honest about the systemic racial injustices that created them.

- Black and Latino lack students face harsher discipline in school. They are taken out of the classroom and punished for subjective offenses at higher rates than their white peers.
- Black male students make up 8% of enrolled K-12 students, but account for 25% of out-of-school suspensions and 27% of expulsions nationwide.
- Nationally, Black girls are four times more likely to be [arrested in school](#) than white girls. In some states, they are more than eight times as likely to be arrested. However, there is no evidence that increased on-campus police officers improve school safety.
- Latino students have the highest rates of high school dropout in the country. While 92.9% of whites had a high school diploma in 2017, only 68.7% of Latinos did.
- Racism is a risk factor for [toxic stress](#), a root cause of some of the most harmful, persistent and expensive health challenges facing our nation. Experiencing racism can increase stress hormones which, without buffering care, can alter/impair several regions of the brain and inhibit the prefrontal cortex, which is responsible for attention, judgement and impulse control. These biological processes are associated with increased risk for learning and behavior problems, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, chronic absenteeism, dropping out of high school, and involvement in the criminal justice system.
- The 2018 average median [household income](#) for black households is $41,361 and $51,450 for Latino households, compared to $70,642 for whites.

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- On average, white households have nearly [seven times the wealth](#) of black families and five times the wealth of Latino families. Unequal wages, homeownership, and wealth inheritance drive the wealth gap.
- College didn't help close the wage gap between 2000 and 2018. In fact, Latinos with a college degree earned roughly the same proportion of white wages in 2018 (82.0%) as they did in 2000 (82.8%), and Black with a college degree earned a smaller proportion of white wages in 2018 (79.0%) than they did in 2000 (82.8%).
- Not only do Latino and Black workers make less than white workers, low-income black and Latino families live in neighborhoods where they are likely to [overpay for housing relative to the opportunities](#) for children those neighborhoods provide, while low-income white children have a balance between housing-cost burden and opportunity level of their neighborhoods. Opportunities include educational, health, environmental, social, and economic opportunity.
- Homeownership is the main source of wealth for many families, but Latino and Black families have historically low homeownership rates. In 2016, 68% of whites owned their homes, compared to 46% of Latinos and 42% of Blacks.
- White families had about six times more average liquid retirements than Black and Latino families in 2016. This is a drastic increase compared to 1989 when white families had about five times more.
- While Blacks and Latinos each account for 13% of the nation's households, they receive only [6% and 7% of the tax benefits](#) from the mortgage interest deduction. White households receive nearly 78% of the deduction's benefits.
- White families receive much larger [inheritances](#) on average than Black families, thus passing on generational wealth. However, the income from inheritances is taxed at an inequitably low rate, especially when compared to earnings. The income that back workers earn is taxed higher than the inheritances that white families receive.
- Blacks, Latinos, and other people of color face disparities in social and economic outcomes because systemic racial injustices created opportunity for some and barriers for others.

Systemic Racial Injustices

For far too long, discriminatory laws and policies prevented people in underserved communities from living healthy lives.

Although many oppose explicit racism, many are unaware of the multifaceted ways in which racism is weaved into public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations.

Racism led to some of the following discriminatory housing and highway policies throughout the 1900s:
- segregating public housing
- investing in suburbs for whites only

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- zoning that separates single-family homes from multifamily dwellings
- requiring minimum lot sizes or square footage to build in certain neighborhoods
- enforcing discriminatory mortgage lending practices, known as "redlining"
- destroying low-income, minority neighborhoods for highways connecting white-majority suburbs to urban areas.
- destroying low-income, minority neighborhoods in the name of urban renewal
- defunding transit
- funding mortgage interest deductions

There was a significant disinvestment in communities of color, from schools to fewer parks and less sidewalks, bike lanes, and transit. This blocked access to quality education, government-financed homeownership, financial development opportunities, and other chances to build wealth.

Racism is at the root of these injustices.

Reducing systemic racial injustices require taking actions to minimize bias at all levels of society by confronting historical oppressions; teaching people to be inclusive form an early age; and exposing people to a variety of cultures, experiences, and perspectives on characteristics.

Cities Can Declare Racism a Public Health Crisis

Policymakers can ensure that all people can live healthy lives by shaping the living conditions where they live, learn, work, and play.

A rising number of cities across the country have passed a resolution to declare racism a public health crisis and commit to specific actions to dismantle it. Dozens more are discussing it.

For example, Cleveland, Columbus, Franklin County, Denver, and Indianapolis have passed resolutions and stated commitments to:
- Always promote and support policies that prioritize the health of all people, especially people of color by mitigating exposure to adverse childhood experiences
- Encourage racial equity training among all community partners, grantees, vendors and contractors
- Identify clear goals and objectives, including periodic reports to assess progress and capitalize on opportunities to further advance racial equity
- Systematic, data-driven focus on poverty, economic mobility, and other factors that impact the social determinants of health
- Continue, with urgency, the review of policies and procedures for the purposes of eradicating implicit and explicit racial bias and develop instead policies and procedures that build racial equity

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- Collect data, disaggregated by race, on department staffing, procurement, contracting, and recipients of government intervention; that departments present the data to the Council and make this data publicly available via their websites, with the intention of incorporating racial equity into the analysis of governmental action and strengthening the city's commitment to analyze and address racial disparities
- Support the establishment of a working group

To dismantle systemic racial injustices, cities needs to look at existing laws and policies and take action to reduce racial and socioeconomic segregation, teach equity, and eliminate institutional discrimination.

Using an Action Pack

Salud America! developed an [Action Pack](#) to support advocates in urging their city leaders to adopt a similar resolution with a commitment for action.

To ensure this effort is as inclusive, equitable, and powerful as possible, community advocates and social justice organizational leaders could provide input and guidance on using this Action Pack to urge city leaders to pass a resolution to declare racism a public health crisis and commit to action to address the ways governmental institutions discriminate through policies and practices.

The Action Pack provides a strong introductory email, talking points, sample resolution, and social media messages to reach out to city leaders and build support.

The Action Pack also includes examples to strengthen commitments within the resolution.

Strengthening Commitments

To strengthen commitment to action, consider addressing more specific and meaningful commitments.

According to the [Blueprint for Changemakers](#) from ChangeLab Solutions, specific actions to dismantle racism could include:
- Ensure racially and economically mixed neighborhoods through land-use planning, housing regulations, rental assistance programs, or school siting policies.
- Prevent housing and job displacement from driving racial and income segregation by enacting land use or affordable housing finance regulations.
- Confront negative stereotypes and reduce racial prejudice and discrimination through school policies and curricula that educate children about the harms of historical oppression and the value of equality and inclusion.

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- Prevent biased policy decision-making and implementation through protocols that require equity analysis o through staff training on equity, bias, and cultural sensitivity.
- Ensure equal and unbiased law enforcement and criminal justice through policies on policing practices and through training, legal system protocols, and sentencing guidelines.
- Improve neighborhood value through community development or neighborhood revitalization, including investment in housing, open space, transportation networks, food systems, and school facilities while protecting priority populations from displacement.
- Reduce housing instability by preserving, protecting, and expanding the supply of quality affordable housing through property tax incentives, rental subsidies, rent stabilization, good cause eviction policies, condominium conversion protections, inclusionary zoning, density bonuses, expedited permitting, or property acquisition.
- Increase the income of the poorest individuals through supplemental income, including Social Security, disability insurance, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, and tax credits, as well as through increased wages, including an increased minimum wage.
- Provide supplemental income to support healthy living through nutrition assistance, wage subsidies, Medicaid, or housing subsidies.
- Subsidize preschool for children from low-income families.
- Expand the coverage and frequency of public transportation, especially in poor areas.
- Provide universal high-quality early childhood education focused on child development, in addition to primary and secondary education.
- Make schools safe, equitable places to learn, and avoid unfairly penalizing students who live in poor neighborhoods or who are experiencing health, learning, or psychosocial challenges – for example, by implementing trauma-informed school discipline or restorative justice policies.
- Increase access to safe, secure, fairly paid work and year-round work for low-income families through direct job creation, apprenticeship programs for those with barriers to employment, or fair-chance hiring for job seekers with criminal records.
- Include mental health care in health care delivery.
- Involve underserved communities in the initiation, drafting, and implementation of policy solutions to local issues related to health equity, through community-based participatory research, inclusive and representative community engagement, participatory budgeting, or public deliberation.
- Create structures for collaboration among local governments, community-based organizations, and health care institutions to act on the social determinants of health.
- Make government protocols and decisions available to the community, and ensure that policies include clear roles, responsibilities, and evaluation processes to hold government responsible for successful implementation.

Additionally, consider pushing decision-makers to publicly measure and track improvement on various health and social outcomes, such as income inequality, disparities in multiple physical

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and mental health conditions, disparities in injury and premature death, population housing cost-burdened, population transportation cost-burden, high school graduation rates, adverse childhood experiences, and more.

More Examples of Disparities in Health and Social Outcomes

- Blacks have a higher mortality rate than any other racial or ethnic group for eight of the top 10 causes of death.
- The life expectancy of Black residents is four years shorter than their white neighbors.
- Latinos have the highest uninsured rates of any racial or ethnic group. In 2017, 49.0% of Latino had private insurance coverage, as compared to 75.4% for non-Latino whites.
- 9% of whites are living poverty. 19% of Latinos and 22% of Blacks are.
- The Latino-white wage gap declined slightly between 2000 and 2018 (12.3%, 11.8% respectively); however, in 2018 median Latino wages were 73.1% of white wages.
- The Black-white wage gap widened drastically between 2000 and 2018 (10.2%, 16.2% respectively). In 2000, median Black wages were 79.2% of white wages; by 2018 they were 73.3% of white wages.
- Across the nation's 100 largest metropolitan areas, low-income renters face higher housing- and transportation-cost burdens than middle-income renters, but fewer opportunities, thus face worse child development and health and reduced earnings as adults. Even in very low-opportunity neighborhoods, the median estimated cost burned for low-income renters is 40% of household income for housing and 26% for transportation, which is well above the recommended cost-burden thresholds of 30% for housing and 15% for transportation. For middle-income families, housing- and transportation-cost burdens are lower than for low-income families, regardless of neighborhood opportunity. Even in very high-opportunity neighborhoods, middle-income renters spend less than 30% of their income on housing, compared to 47.7% for low-income renters.
- The Black-white homeownership gap is larger today than in 1968, when housing discrimination was blatantly legal. Homeownership rates are lower for Black college graduates (56.4%) than white high school dropouts (60.5%).
- The federal government spends over $400 billion to support asset development, through mortgage interest deduction, state and local property tax deductions, and employer-sponsored retirement plans, but those subsidies primarily benefit the top 20% of taxpayers, thus contribute to wider wealth gaps.