



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
AND MENTAL HYGIENE
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Commissioner

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BOARD OF HEALTH PASSES RESOLUTION DECLARING RACISM A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

The resolution recognizes the impact of racism on health during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

The resolution requests several actions from the Health Department including making recommendations to the NYC Racial Justice Commission, establishing a Data for Equity working group, performing an anti-racism review of the NYC Health Code, and issuing a semi-annual report on progress associated with this resolution

October 18, 2021 – The New York City Board of Health today passed a [landmark resolution on racism as a public health crisis](#), requesting that the Health Department expand its anti-racism work. The resolution institutionalizes the vision behind the [Health Department’s June 2020 declaration](#) and requires that the Department develop and implement priorities for a racially just recovery from COVID-19, as well as other actions to address this public health crisis in the short and long term.

“To build a healthier New York City, we must confront racism as a public health crisis,” said **Health Commissioner Dr. Dave A. Chokshi**. “The COVID-19 pandemic magnified inequities, leading to suffering disproportionately borne by communities of color in our City and across our nation. But these inequities are not inevitable. Today is an historic day for the country’s oldest Board of Health to officially recognize this crisis and demand action.”

“We’ve seen for years the negative impact racism has in our public health data and today, we’re recommitting ourselves to building a more equitable City,” said **First Deputy Commissioner and Chief Equity Officer Dr. Torian Easterling**. “I thank the Board of Health for sharing our commitment to dismantling systemic racism.

The resolution recognizes the impact of racism on the health of New Yorkers and requests the Health Department perform a series of actions, including:

1. That the NYC Health Department research, clarify, and acknowledge examples of its historic role in divesting and underinvesting in critical community-led health programs, and participate in a truth and reconciliation process with communities harmed by these actions when possible;

2. That the NYC Health Department establish a Data for Equity internal working group to ensure the agency apply an intersectional, anti-racism equity lens to public health data and provide annual guidance to other NYC Mayoral agencies on best practices to collect and make available to the Health Department relevant data to track and improve health equity;
3. That the NYC Health Department make recommendations on anti-racism, health-related NYC Charter revisions to the newly established Mayoral Racial Justice Commission to strengthen the NYC's effort to combat racism;
4. That the NYC Health Department continue collaborations with sister agencies to report on fatalities, injuries, health conditions, by race, gender, and other demographics, to improve data quality and care;
5. That the NYC Health Department in consultation with relevant community organizations perform an anti-racism review of the NYC Health Code to identify any existing provisions that support systemic and structural racism and bias and recommend new provisions to dismantle systemic and structural racism and bias;
6. That the NYC Health Department partner with city agencies and relevant organizations, consistent with Local Law 174 (dated October 13, 2019) and Executive Order 45 (dated May 8, 2019), to advise on assessments of structural racism within policies, plans and budgets related to all determinants of health (transportation, education, housing, economic opportunities, civic participation and healthcare delivery contexts) and make recommendations to mitigate harm within a public health context; and
7. That the NYC Health Department report twice each year to the BOH to promote the work associated with this resolution and to ensure Health Department accountability on progress.

"I applaud today's bold and necessary action by the NYC Board of Health declaring racism a public health crisis and directing the Health Department to take concrete steps to promote an anti-racist public health agenda," said **New York State Senator Brand Hoylman**.

"The combined effect of institutional racism and the COVID-19 pandemic on Black and Brown New Yorkers represent an urgent call to action which we can no longer ignore as a government or society."

"From mental health to maternal care, Black and Brown New Yorkers have experienced the systemic inequities that exist in patient care within our hospitals and clinics for generations. Before and most notably during the COVID-19 pandemic, we witnessed the life-threatening and sometimes fatal consequences of prejudice and bias within our society. DOHMH's declaration that racism is a public health crisis is a vital step forward in removing the longstanding barriers to quality healthcare for all while rebuilding public trust. We need to dedicate more resources to uprooting racism from all public spaces, particularly within health institutions where people of all backgrounds deserve to be seen, heard, treated fairly and with dignity. By cultivating community partnerships and engaging in public dialogue, DOHMH can champion equity to improve the patient experience and quality of life for New Yorkers," said **Council Member Farah N. Louis, Chair of the Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, and Addictions**.

“I commend the New York City Board of Health for joining some 200 jurisdictions and institutions across the country to declare racism a public health crisis,” said **Dr. Mary T. Bassett, FXB Center for Health and Human Rights director and incoming New York State Health Commissioner**. “Crucially, this call places centrality on complete and timely data and community collaboration. To assess the extent of the harm of racism to health and longevity is key to long overdue redress. I urge others to follow the Board’s example.”

"For too long structural racism has predetermined the health outcomes of too many of our communities," said **Dr. Oxiris Barbot, Senior Fellow for Public Health and Social Justice at the JPB Foundation**. “Operationalizing a health equity agenda for communities to have the greatest opportunity to realize their fullest health potential requires institutions to undo historical practices that have caused harm. This Board of Health action paves the way for concrete actions our city needs to undo the pernicious legacy of racism as a public health crisis."

“As the nation's premiere health department and largest local jurisdiction promoting and protecting the health of people, this is incredible news and movement,” said **Chief Health Equity Officer and Senior Vice President of the American Medical Association and Former and Founding Deputy Commissioner of the Center for Health Equity within the Health Department, Dr. Aletha Maybank**. “Thanks to the Board of Health for solidifying and structuring this commitment to racial justice for sustainability in NYC. Special thanks to the many leaders and voices across our city that have elevated the existence and harms of racism for generations and advocated for change. And final thanks to the many justice warriors that I had the privilege to work alongside in the Health Department and the Mayor's Office who began to lay the foundation for this governmental declaration and commitment over six years ago. This continued urgency and leadership to confront racism as well as dismantle, imagine, and redesign systems that do not exclude, or harm are paramount to moving closer to the vision and realization of a city that affirms the human rights of people and their collective desires for dignity, justice, liberation, and joy.”

“NBEC is in solidarity with the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene,” said **Director of Technical Assistance at the National Birth Equity Collaborative, Lilliann Paine, MPH**. “By declaring racism a public health crisis, this puts the discussion of race and racism in the foreground of national debate. This resolution is the first step of accountability for the past harms and future solutions the NYC DOHMH will amend and conditions the department will create to ensure optimal health for the citizens of NYC.”

“I’m inspired to learn that New York City is taking this historic step in addressing racism’s role in policies and practices,” said **Dr. Jeanette Kowalik, former City of Milwaukee Commissioner of Health and current Director of Policy Development at the Trust for America’s Health**. “Declaring racism is a public health crisis now is necessary especially for one of the greatest cities in the United States. As diverse as NYC is, we know that it was and still is impacted by harmful policies and practices that oppressed Black, Brown, and Indigenous people for decades. Acknowledging that there’s a problem is the first step to bold and collective action which should be centered in community and well- funded over many years. Thank you!”

“I applaud the New York City Board of Health for today’s action to identify racism as a public health crisis,” said **APHA Executive Director Georges C. Benjamin, MD**. “The step they are taking today to make a public declaration will start an important conversation that will lead to concrete steps that address health inequities.”

“Congratulations to the NYC Board of Health on this Resolution that confronts racism denial and moves to action!” said **Past President of the American Public Health Association, Camara Jones, MD, MPH, PhD**. “Yes, racism exists. Yes, racism is a system. Yes, racism saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources. And YES, we CAN ACT to dismantle racism! Going forward, make your institutional walls more porous by partnering with and investing in communities. Build bridges with other sectors because health is not created within the health sector. And always be guided by these three principles for achieving health equity: value all individuals and populations equally; recognize and rectify historical injustices; and provide resources according to need. Thank you for being a model for the nation!

“Today’s historic move by the NYC Board of Health to declare racism a public health crisis is vitally important – and long overdue” said **Executive Director for the Drug Policy Alliance Kassandra Frederique**. “Over decades of Drug Policy Alliance’s work in New York we have seen firsthand how racism has driven extreme harm: skyrocketing overdose deaths of Black and Latinx New Yorkers; racist drug enforcement destroying communities and providing a pretext for police violence; and draconian drug war criminalization leading to discrimination in housing, employment, child welfare, and many more systems that impact the daily lives of New Yorkers. The public health effects of racism have been catastrophic, and the extreme disparities have been clear for decades. Confronting racism head on and intentionally crafting policy to address the myriad harms for individual New Yorkers and communities of color is not the ultimate outcome we seek – it is the starting point. This declaration is momentous and must be concretely borne out every single day from here forward across all city policy.”

The resolution goes into effect immediately.

The Health Department grounds this resolution in the long-standing efforts led by the Race to Justice and Take Care New York. Both teams aim to promote justice and build capacity within the agency and with community partners to improve health outcomes for all New Yorkers.

There have been [more than 200 declarations of racism as a public health crisis](#) across the United States including [from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#). New York City’s resolution is one of the first to tie specific actions to its declaration.

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