



## Jackson County Department of Public Health

154 Medical Park Loop • Sylva, NC 28779

Tel: 828-586-8994 • FAX: 828-586-3493

Shelley Carraway

DIRECTOR

### **JACKSON COUNTY BOARD OF HEALTH RESOLUTION DECLARING RACISM A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS**

WHEREAS, Public health is defined as the science and art of preventing disease, prolonging and improving life through organized effort for the sanitation of the environment, the control of communicable infections, the education of the individual in personal hygiene, the organization of medical and nursing services for the early diagnosis and preventive treatment of disease, and for the development of the social machinery to insure everyone a standard of living adequate for the maintenance of health, so organizing these benefits as to enable every citizen their birthright of health and longevity;<sup>1</sup> and

WHEREAS, Racism is defined by American Public Health Association (APHA) Past-President Camara Phyllis Jones as a system of structuring opportunity and assigned value based on the social interpretation of how one looks that unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities, unfairly advantages other individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources;<sup>2</sup> and

WHEREAS, Public health's responsibilities to address racism include reshaping our discourse and agenda so that we all actively engage in racial justice work; and

WHEREAS, Racism causes persistent racial discrimination influencing many areas of life including income, wealth, education, criminal justice, health, and democratic participation. Further, an emerging body of research shows that racism is a driving force of the social determinants of health;<sup>3</sup> and

WHEREAS, the APHA has deemed racism undeniably a public health issue and has launched a National Campaign Against Racism;<sup>2</sup> and

WHEREAS, the North Carolina Public Health Association (NCPHA) released a statement recognizing the broad public health impacts of systemic racism and acknowledging inequalities in public health work. NCPHA further stated that if we are to advance public health in North Carolina and around the country, we must continue to work together to address systemic racism as an underlying issue;<sup>4</sup> and

WHEREAS, it is well-documented that racism itself has an adverse impact on health. Chronic stress caused by racism can trigger a cascade of adverse health outcomes, from high blood pressure, heart disease, diabetes, cancer, autoimmune syndromes, anxiety, and depression;<sup>5</sup> and

WHEREAS, the Healthy North Carolina 2030 Report states that the root cause for the health disparities seen in populations of color is the historical and continued structural racism that has



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resulted in the inequitable opportunities for healthy lives.<sup>6</sup> Examples of these disparities in the United States and North Carolina include:

- Black mothers continue to have the lowest rates of breastfeeding initiation and continuation at 6 months and 12 months as compared to other racial groups in the US.<sup>7</sup>
- Black and American Indian children in North Carolina experience greater rates of death than white children (28.2 per 100,000 and 27.8 per 100,000 respectively as compared to 21.4 per 100,000).<sup>8</sup>
- Lack of health insurance disproportionately affects Hispanic and American Indian populations in North Carolina as compared to white populations (29.6% and 18.2% respectively as compared to 9.6%).<sup>8</sup>
- American Indian and Hispanic children in North Carolina have higher rates of tooth decay than white children (55% and 52% respectively as compared to 30%).<sup>8</sup>

Examples of these disparities in Jackson County include:

- Black and Hispanic populations have significantly higher rates of poverty than white populations (61.4% and 56.0% respectively as compared to 20.8%).<sup>9</sup>
- Hispanic mothers are less likely to receive prenatal care in their first trimester than white mothers (51.2% as compared to 75.4%), due to various reasons ranging from access to care to cultural differences.<sup>10</sup>
- Black and Hispanic mothers are more likely to experience unintended pregnancies than white mothers (51.6% and 30.8% respectively as compared to 24.8%).<sup>11</sup>
- Black and American Indian populations have higher rates of death than white populations (1,005.8 per 100,000 and 1,200.2 per 100,000 respectively as compared to 706.8 per 100,000). The following causes of death where racial differences were of note include diseases of the heart, cancer, diabetes, and other unintentional injuries.<sup>12</sup>

WHEREAS, the Jackson County Department of Public Health's Cultural Humility and Social Diversity Team asserts that it is the mission of public health to ensure an environment in which everyone in Jackson County has an opportunity to attain their highest level of health. This opportunity for health equity cannot be attained without addressing systemic racism in our community.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Jackson County Board of Health will:

1. Assert that racism is a public health crisis affecting our community.



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2. Treat racism with the urgency and funding of a public health crisis.
3. In collaboration with Jackson County Department of Public Health (JCDPH) staff, educate our community about the threat of racism as a public health crisis.
4. In collaboration with JCDPH staff, identify specific activities to embrace cultural humility and social diversity while incorporating anti-racism principles across the agency.
5. Continue to partner and build alliances with local organizations that address and confront racism.
6. Support JCDPH staff as they review internal policies and procedures and make recommendations of changes needed to ensure racial equity.

Adopted by the Jackson County Board of Health on October 12, 2020.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathlynn A. Farmer".

Kathy Farmer, Chairperson

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gayle Woody".

Gayle Woody, Vice Chairperson

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