

July 22, 2020

The Center for Health Equity Transformation (CHET) stands in solidarity with #blacklivesmatter and other organizations and efforts that give voice to the suffering and anger in our communities. These efforts come after centuries of sustained systemic racism that have impacted and exterminated the lives of millions of Black and Brown people. We mourn the latest victims of structural and interpersonal racism: Breonna Taylor, one of our own—a former University of Kentucky student shot eight times by police while sleeping in her home; George Floyd, unarmed and murdered in the public eye while under police custody; Ahmaud Arbery, chased down and murdered by white men while jogging. These are just the latest and most visible of the heinous acts perpetrated on Black people over 400 years of oppression.

Racism constitutes a public health crisis born out of the legacy of slavery and continued oppression. This public health crisis stems from systemic racism and manifests itself in numerous forms, including police violence that kills Blacks at nearly three times the rates of whites; severely impeded access to healthcare; and the disproportionate prevalence of many preventable conditions including maternal mortality, diabetes, asthma, hypertension, heart disease, and cancer. Like the recent murders referenced above, the inequitable prevalence of COVID-19 highlights this latest public health and societal crisis. Black and Indigenous people's mortality rates from COVID-19 are twice that of all other racial/ethnic groups. These forces contribute to the egregious inequities in life expectancy between Black and white men (72.2 versus 76.6 years) and Black and white women (78.2 versus 81.1 years).

The horrible truth is that none of these events or circumstances is new. For as long as this country has existed, racist ideology has been used to assign lower value to some groups compared with others. This ideology was used to justify the systematic enslavement of Black people for over 400 years and manifests itself today in policies and practices that disproportionately affect communities of color such as mass incarceration, disenfranchisement of voting rights, policy brutality, residential segregation, inadequate and underfunded schools, and lack of access to quality health care. At CHET, we acknowledge the unacceptable reality of the disproportionate burden of stress, violence, illness and death on communities of color. We repudiate the legacy of racism in our society that devalues the lives of our friends, neighbors, community members, and ourselves.

Witnessing a newfound awareness on the part of many organizations and individuals who maintain the power structure gives us hope and suggests a critical turning point in conversations about racism, racialized poverty and health inequities. It is encouraging to see and hear people from all walks of life standing up for others; corporations and universities committing themselves to anti-racism planning and employing anti-racist language; and a renewed reckoning and sense of commitment to greater equity, inclusivity and diversity. This widespread attention to long-standing structural racism that pervades our society is welcome, but it will take intentional, deep, and sustained efforts on the part of whites and others in positions of power to make permanent change. We in CHET are taking this opportunity to re-commit to enacting sustained and meaningful change by pursuing bold action beyond mere words. CHET commits to:



