

Linn County Board of Health Position Statement: Racism as a Public Health Crisis

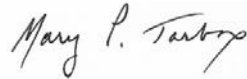
Two of the essential services of the Linn County Board of Health are to inform, educate and empower people about health issues and to mobilize community partnerships to identify and solve health problems. While management of the current Covid-19 pandemic is an ongoing challenge, we are greatly concerned about the unjust loss of black lives in recent weeks. This national experience has highlighted the institutional and systemic racism which has claimed many lives and impacted the health and dignity of many others. Racism is the result of a long and often ignored institutionalized discrimination and persecution of African Americans, unfortunately manifest all too often as violence against African Americans in encounters with the police. Such violence extending deep into the history of our country has cost countless lives and produced dramatic health disparities and other negative effects on the social and economic well-being of black Americans. Racism is a public health crisis, and Linn County Public Health is committed to addressing it as such. Violence or the threat of violence—driven by on-going, systematic racism—creates a stressful environment which impacts the health of children, families, and communities.

More than 100 studies have linked racism to worse health outcomes for people of color¹. Such studies have documented disproportionate rates of COVID-19 illness and death in African American/People of Color communities² as well as police violence that disproportionately affects minorities and is a leading cause of death for young men of color³. We have carefully and deliberately reviewed these issues and offer the following position statement from the Linn County Board of Health. We believe:

- That racism is a public health crisis affecting all of us.
- That efforts are needed to build ties between local governments and communities focusing on health equity to achieve community-centered solutions.
- That the anticipation and long-term effects of violence and daily intimidation increase toxic stress, severely harming the health of families and whole communities.
- That community leaders of all sectors in Linn County should work to create inclusive organizations and businesses by identifying specific activities and policies which increase diversity across workforce and in leadership positions.
- That we shall collaboratively establish an Office of Minority Health at LCPH.
- That we shall ensure that all aspects of Linn County Public Health's Health Equity Policy (PO-CA-006) are implemented into agency policies, processes, and programs.
- That our organizations and businesses should incorporate implicit bias training, inclusion and equity into organizational practice; offer educational training/activities to expand employees' understanding of how racism affects individuals and the health of marginalized populations; provide tools to enable everyone to engage actively and authentically with communities of color.

We as a community must work to support African Americans experiencing violence and other negative conditions resulting from systemic and institutional racism. Linn County Public Health calls on our policymakers, businesses, schools, and other community leaders and institutions to begin taking the necessary actions to address persistent discrimination in housing, education, employment, criminal justice, and healthcare that ultimately leads to poorer health outcomes among people of color. Creating equity and confronting racism directly will lead to improvement in the social determinants of health for everyone in our community and provide the social justice that is long overdue.

Mary Tarbox, Chair



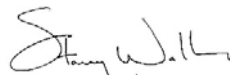
Leslie Wright, Vice-chair



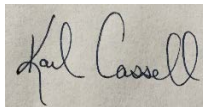
James Levett



Stacey Walker



Karl Cassell



- 1: Mays, V. M., Cochran, S. D., & Barnes, N. W. (2007). Race, race-based discrimination, and health outcomes among African Americans. *Annual review of psychology*, 58, 201–225. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.57.102904.190212>
- 2: Pirtle, W. (2020). Racial Capitalism: A Fundamental Cause of Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) Pandemic Inequities in the United States. *Health Education & Behavior*. 109019812092294. 10.1177/1090198120922942
- 3: Edwards, F., Lee, H., & Esposito, M. (2019). Risk of being killed by police use of force in the United States by age, race-ethnicity, and sex. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 116(34), 16793–16798. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1821204116>