



11/10/2020

Clark County Council
Clark County Government
1300 Franklin St.
PO Box 5000
Vancouver, WA 98666-5000

Council Chair Quiring and County Council members:

The Southwest Washington Accountable Community of Health (SWACH) requests that Clark County, Washington, formally address racism as a public health crisis.

Clark County's leadership is critical for our community to achieve widespread impactful change. Addressing racism as a public health issue will compel organizations and governmental units to address the crisis in the broad, systemic ways that other threats to public health have been addressed over time. These can include strategic initiatives in policies, practices, enforcement, education, and support services. Your leadership in Clark County is critical for our community to achieve widespread, impactful change. We hope we can create a culture in which we all hold each other accountable.

Since 2016, SWACH has brought together cross-sector partners to create equitable, sustainable systems change to improve health equity. This includes convening an Equity Collaborative in which SWACH, along with its partners, are working towards advancing equity through both institutional and structural change. At the same time, within SWACH we are also reexamining our policies, practices, culture and outcomes to ensure support for health equity. We are making progress and this work is ongoing.

Health equity is much more than the ability to access health care. As a community we need to address housing, employment, education and professional and organizational partnerships.

Racism does not exist in a vacuum. Improving public health systems and practices and living conditions is absolutely necessary for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). Racial discrimination affects access to safe and affordable housing, healthcare, education and employment-essentially every dimension of living as a BIPOC-while also dis-empowering members of these communities from having a voice or sense of agency in their lives.

In Clark County:

- 6.3% of Clark County residents are uninsured; 17.8% of Hispanic and 25% of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander;
- 5.4 % of the total population is unemployed; 12.3% of American Indian/ Alaska Native, 10.7% of Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander, and 9.8% of Black people are unemployed;





- 13% of the county overall lives in poverty; 18.4% of American Indian/Alaska Native, 21.3% of Black, 21.5% of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and 24% of Hispanic people live at or below 125% of the Federal Poverty Level;

The impact of systemic racism on the lives of BIPOC has been amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic. Communities of color are facing not only disproportionate numbers of underlying health conditions, but also inequitable access to health insurance, testing, treatment, and care. Such long-standing systemic health and social inequities have resulted in racial and ethnic minority groups being at increased risk of contracting COVID-19 and/or experiencing more severe illness as a result, regardless of age.

In our work with community partners, including Clark County Public Health, it has become even more evident that racism is a public health crisis. Racism is and will remain a public health crisis until words become constructive actions.

As Clark County Councilors you have demonstrated your leadership in many areas. We are asking you to establish this same level of direction relating to racism and health equity. This leadership would include addressing policies and programs to ensure equal opportunity for all in our community.

We ask that the Clark County Councilors declare racism a public health crisis as a necessary first step to eliminating race-based inequities. SWACH is ready to partner with you to identify next steps on this very important journey to improve the overall health for every individual in our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbe West". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Barbe West
Executive Director
SWACH

Washington Tracking Network SDOH Dashboard:

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/DataandStatisticalReports/HealthDataVisualization/SocialDeterminantsofHealth/Dashboards/CountySocialDeterminantsofHealth>

