



Public Health Nurse Leaders Statement on Racism as a Public Health Emergency

The California Directors of Public Health Nursing (CDPHN), a professional organization dedicated to advancing the practice of public health through innovative and effective public health nursing leadership, joins national organizations such as, the Association of Public Health Nursing (APHN) in **declaring racism a public health emergency**.

Since the beginnings of the United States, Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) have been continuously confronted with systems, policies, practices, and beliefs that are detrimental to their physical, social, and mental wellbeing and survival. These legalized forms of discrimination, deeply woven into the fabric of America, continue to destroy communities of color by preventing them from achieving their full potential. The forcible removal of Indigenous people from their native lands, enslavement, unfair housing and labor practices, segregation in the use of public facilities including schools and recent events captured on video of police brutalizing and killing Black and Brown Americans, are examples of institutionalized racism that has been oppressing and abusing communities of color.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the American Medical Association (AMA) regard the impact of racism on health as a public health threat and the American Public Health Association (APHA) and many cities and counties in California have declared racism a public health crisis. It is an epidemic that must be fought with multiple resources and on multiple levels just as our nation's fight to combat COVID-19.

The disproportionate suffering of BIPOC from COVID-19 has brought attention to how the effects of racism affected communities of color. Communities of color have long suffered the impact of social and environmental inequities on their health, including higher rates of homicide, maternal and infant mortality, chronic health conditions, low life expectancy, inadequate access to health care services and information, exposure to lead and other environmental contaminants, substandard housing/homelessness, stress, and criminalization.

The 2008 documentary, *Unnatural Causes*, brought to light the disturbing socioeconomic and racial/ethnic disparities in health affecting BIPOC, with the root cause of these disparities not being the result of genetics, but due to individual and systemic racist-based policies/practices. Research studies have long emphasized that good health outcomes in relation to the *Social Determinants of Health (SDoH)* are the result of economic stability, safe housing, parks and transportation, education, access to healthy food options, social supports and community engagement, and the availability and quality of health care; however, achieving good health outcomes at an individual level is daunting, when the systems governing individuals are unsupportive. The California Directors of Public Health Nursing is committed to taking action to address and eliminate the health, socioeconomic and environmental disparities caused by systemic racism, making California a place of racial equity and justice.