



Racism: A Public Health Crisis Position Statement

Adopted July 20, 2020

Peoria County Board of Health Recognizes Racism as a Challenge in Becoming a Healthy Community and Supports an Equity Approach to Address the Outcomes of Racism.

The Peoria County Board of Health supports the need to recognize racism as a public health crisis and reaffirm our role in providing an equitable approach towards health.

The Peoria County Board of Health recognizes the following premises in regard to the position statement:

- Racism, as defined by the American Public Health Association, is a negative social system that creates and structures opportunity and assigns value based on how a person looks. Thus, creating conditions that unfairly provide advantage to some and unfairly disadvantage others. Racism may be intentional or unintentional and operates at various levels in society.¹
- Racism is a driving force of the social determinants of health and is a barrier to achieving optimal health. It is a multifaceted experience manifested individually, interpersonally, or systemically, which includes institutional and structural impacts.
- Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, racism has been ingrained in many facets of the American institutions and culture for hundreds of year. Some of us know this more painfully than others from personal experience, while some of us are becoming more sensitized to it from the public recognition of occurrences across the country or from research data related to health outcomes.
- Additionally, the Board of Health recognizes the importance of defining further key areas in regard to racism. Structural racism is further defined as a system of policies, priorities, representations, practices and norms that reinforces ways to perpetuate racial groups. Institutional racism which includes policies and practices that intentionally favor “whiteness”. Lastly, white privilege is defined as the historical and collective advantages “whites” have in accessing resources and assets.²
- The impact of racism is experienced overwhelmingly by black and brown persons of all ages and is manifested in the form of inequities as well as creates responses that result in physical, emotional, and spiritual distress.
- Lastly, the Board of Health recognize that a comprehensive Health Equity approach and other related strategies are imperative in addressing the devastation of racism.

Position Statement

Racism, is a public health crisis that devastates the person and community in physical, emotional, and spiritual ways. Additionally, it creates inequities that influence health. Racism leads to significant disparities in the quality and length of life for people of color.

Though the recent national focus has been on law enforcement activities, data from the COVID-19 pandemic and other illnesses demonstrates that racial/ethnic populations, face various factors in their daily lives which contribute both in poor health and poor social determinants of health: poverty, discrimination, lack of access to quality education and safe living environments. These inequities exist in both urban and rural populations resulting in a higher prevalence of chronic diseases and higher chronic disease mortality rates, as well as higher rates of suicide, injury, gun violence, and substance use as demonstrated by national and Peoria County data.

The **vision** of the Peoria County City/County Health Department (PCCHD) and Board of Health (BOH) directors has been to be a trusted leader in a healthy, thriving community. This position statement highlights the role we chose to play to support our public health and a healthy community.

As part of the current strategic plan, the Peoria County Board of Health and Peoria City/County Health Department staff have incorporated problem statements and action plans to address equity in structural and institutional racism. Improving community health and longevity starts with ensuring all communities feel and are safe and have equitable access to health care, healthy food, good schools, safe and affordable housing and employment opportunities to establish and maintain a healthy lifestyle. To this end, the BOH and PCCHD are committed to establishing a clearinghouse of data and outcome metrics as well as taking action under these core concepts:

- All PCCHD policies and practices meet the operational standards of health equity. By recognizing that racism is a social determinant of health and that to truly address Health Equity in policies and practices, the underlying individual and systemic racism needs to be addressed. In addition, understanding the impacts of generational racism creates community trauma and negatively impacts health outcomes and indicators;
- Diversity is valued and celebrated as a critical asset of our workplace and community. The Peoria County Board of Health and Peoria City/County Health Department work to educate, create understanding, acceptance and change all towards unlearning racism and ensuring equity is applied in all of our organizational policies and practices;
- Investment in historically devalued communities of color by examining built-environmental practices (i.e. housing, businesses, infrastructure), supporting

community development programming, and advocating for “Health in All Policies” approach for redevelopment;

- Supporting the delivery of public health services and community-based interventions to the greatest extent possible;
- PCCHD staff and BOH members actively participate in community dialogues, institutional structure development and actions planning to implement the structural changes required for a healthy community; and
- Advocating to Health Department consumers to actively participate in the election process at all levels of government.

We will develop a comprehensive plan for addressing the public health crisis associated with racism that supports municipal, educational, spiritual, and healthcare strategies. The cornerstone of this plan will be Health Equity.

Between 2019-2020 PCCHD has engaged in activities which reinforce our goal in commitment of health equity:

- Partnering to establish the first Southside Farmers Market to combat the perpetual food desert and food insecurities;
- Prioritizing the distribution of the Edwards Coal Plant Settlement for environmental health issues to the Peoria County communities of concern;
- Coordinating to ensure students have access to healthy meals, and other supportive resources during the COVID-19 crisis and beyond;
- In partnership with Heartland Health Services Clinic, expanded services for greater access to comprehensive community health services;
- Aligning prison social services work to assist in re-entry programing focused on decreasing recidivism;
- Active in the implementation of the 2020-2022 Community Health Improvement Plan; and
- Supporting efforts on built-environment programming in vulnerable neighborhoods.

We would fail as a trusted public health leader if we do not recognize and speak out on the impact of racism. Therefore, we will work to foster within ourselves and others a culture of health equity.