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Board of Health declares racism a public health crisis

Community Health Plan expands to fifth issue area advancing Health Equity and Justice

LAWRENCE – The Lawrence-Douglas County Board of Health has declared racism a public health crisis and directed Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health to work with the steering committee for the Community Health Plan to add a fifth issue area in the plan focused on Health Equity.

“A bright light has been shown on longstanding unequal treatment by the recent injustices resulting in the murders of Black people, and their disproportionate deaths in this time of COVID-19,” the Board said in its statement approved during its [regular meeting in July](#). “We are all called to end racism and its harm to public health and wellbeing, and we publicly claim that as this community’s public health responsibility

Board members noted findings in the [2018 Douglas County Health Equity Report](#) and other identified health disparities by race in the community, that include compared to the Douglas County population it is:

- 4.5 times more likely for young Black children to live in poverty
- 2 times more likely for Black mothers — regardless of educational attainment, socioeconomic status or access to care to have babies born at a low birth weight
- 3 times more likely for Black residents to have a hospitalization due to asthma
- 4.7 times more likely that an African American person is incarcerated than a white person.

“Racism is a public health issue because health disparities are preventable. Unfair treatment of racial and ethnic minorities leads to restricted opportunities and associated stress that negatively affect health outcomes,” the statement read. “The public health charge is to support collaborative action that changes policies, programs, and practices to reverse systemic racism and its effects on health and wellbeing.”

Health Board members are Michael Williams, Shanda Hurla, Verdell Taylor, Hugh Carter, Erica Hill, Sandy Praeger, Stephen Fawcett and Diana Malott. The [full statement](#) is available at LDCHealth.org.

The Board directed Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health to work with the Douglas County Community Health Plan Steering Committee to include a fifth

issue area focused on Health Equity. We will ask the Steering Committee to convene community-based organizations and engage racial and ethnic minorities and allies in advancing Health Equity and Justice.

“This Health Equity issue area will be led by community-based organizations and engaged racial and ethnic minority community members. Through community-driven dialogue and strategic planning, we will advance listening, learning and action,” according to the statement.

About Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health

Nationally accredited Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health has served the Lawrence and Douglas County community for more than 130 years. Its mission is to advance policies, practices and programs that promote health for all, prevent disease and protect the environment.

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