

News Release

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COMMISSIONERS JOIN HEALTH DEPARTMENT IN DECLARING RACISM PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

The Franklin County Commissioners this morning passed a resolution acknowledging racism as a public health crisis in America, joining Franklin County Public Health which made a similar [declaration](#) last week, and a growing chorus of public health officials in recognizing racism as a social determinant of health. The resolution refers back to the commissioners' earlier work on poverty and their 2019 Rise Together Blueprint for addressing poverty in Central Ohio, which identified institutional "structural and systemic racism" as a leading cause of economic disparities between whites and people of color. It notes that race itself is a social construct, and that racism is a social system that causes persistent discrimination and disparate results in many areas, including health outcomes.

"Nothing is more important than the health and wellbeing of our residents," said Board of Commissioners President John O'Grady. "Our community's success depends on all Franklin County residents being able to share in it, but right now we have a system that is resulting in different outcomes for people based on the color of their skin. That's not acceptable."

The commissioners' resolution notes that black Ohioans have lower life expectancies than their white neighbors and are more likely to die of heart disease or stroke, be overweight, have diabetes, and also suffer higher infant mortality rates and low birth weights. The Health Policy Institute of Ohio notes that black mothers are more likely to have postpartum depression but less likely to get treatment, and that black women at risk for breast cancer get less preventative-care information.

"Hundreds of years of systemic racism, from slavery to segregation, redlining to Jim Crow, and discrimination in housing, finance, and education, some of which persists today, have led to predictable inequities," said Commissioner Marilyn Brown. "We won't solve these things overnight, but it's important to start by recognizing them and beginning to work purposefully for change."

In Franklin County Health Public Health's declaration last week, Health Commissioner Joe Mazzola acknowledged that results are the same regardless of whether the racism is intentional or unintentional, and a recent article in Science Magazine found racial bias embedded in a widely-used mathematical algorithm that health systems use to assign health risks to patients.

"Racism has been a pandemic long before the current coronavirus pandemic," said Commissioner Kevin L. Boyce. "Our declaration today is important, but it's not saying anything that hasn't been apparent for a long time. COVID-19 has highlighted the health divide between black and white Ohioans, however, and I hope that it can be the catalyst we need to reform the whole health system so that it works for all of us equally."

The text of today's resolution can be found at https://crms.franklincountyohio.gov/RMSWeb/pdfs/68145.FINAL_Resolution_FCPH_DeclaredRacismPublicHealthCrisis.pdf