

HENNEPIN COUNTY  
MINNESOTA

# Race Equity Advisory Council Annual Report

2022-2023

Hennepin County Race Equity Advisory Council  
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# Introduction and Membership

## Introduction

The mission of the Race Equity Advisory Council is to strengthen the county's goal of disparity reduction and to advise the county board and county administration on the county's vision and strategy focused on reducing racial disparities and advancing racial equity throughout Hennepin County.

## Membership

Member	District	Commissioner Appointed / At-Large
Blakey, Joan	5	At-Large
Ehrmantraut, Paola	2	At-Large
Fall, Mame "Samba"	7	At-Large
Jarabek, Raquel	5	At-Large
Kane, Bocar	6	Commissioner Appointed
McPherson, Susan	7	At-Large
Mistry, Jigar	6	At-Large
Mwangi, Esther	4	At-Large
Oresanya, Olufunso "Olu"	4	At-Large
Reindorf, Roberta	1	Commissioner Appointed
Rogers, Yolonda	7	At-Large
Salchert, April	4	At-Large
Tipping, William "Bill"	2	At-Large
Yehle, Ralph	3	Commissioner Appointed

# Executive Summary

Based on the Hennepin County Board of Commissioners' feedback on the 2022 REAC Report, our council focused on two main areas for 2023: income inequality and youth mental health. The committees for these topic areas are chaired by Raquel Jarebek, Bocar Kane, and Paola Ehrmantraut, respectively.

Additionally, this year we made some organizational changes:

- We established the Progress and Review committee. This committee was formed to help REAC track the impact and effectiveness of our recommendations and provide direction and strategy in how we collect information for future reports. This committee is chaired by Olufunso Oresanya.
- We created two administrative forms: A request form for internal requests for information and a request form for external speakers and presenters. Both forms help streamline how the council gathers information.

We believe the steps we have taken this year will provide REAC with the structure necessary to ensure REAC members can effectively request and manage the information necessary to produce future reports. Both request forms can be found in the Appendix.

## Summary of REAC work and findings

We agree with Valerie Wilson, labor economist and director of the Program on Race, Ethnicity, and the Economy (PREE) at the Economic Policy Institute (EPI), when she says that, while “we are in this together” became a rallying cry during the pandemic, “evidence to date suggests that Black and Hispanic workers face much more economic and health insecurity from COVID-19 than white workers.” (from [Inequities exposed: How COVID-19 widened racial inequities in education, health, and the workforce](#))

Beyond the disparity that exists across the nation, Minnesota has its own unresolved history of racial disparities, placing the state third in the racial wealth gap and income gap according to the [2023's States with the Biggest and Smallest Wealth Gaps by Race/Ethnicity](#).

Overall Rank*	State	Total Score	Biggest Median Household Income Gap (most disadvantaged group)	Biggest Homeownership Rate Gap (most disadvantaged group)	Biggest Poverty Rate Gap** (most disadvantaged group)
1	District of Columbia	75.49	66.49% (Black People)	33.92% (Hispanics)	303.33% (Black People)
2	Wisconsin	68.70	50.27% (Black People)	66.54% (Black People)	249.43% (Black People)
3	Minnesota	63.63	46.60% (Black People)	66.73% (Black People)	271.83% (Black People)
4	North Dakota	61.34	42.59% (Black People)	87.50% (Black People)	229.27% (Black People)

Source [States with the Biggest and Smallest Wealth Gaps by Race/Ethnicity in 2023 \(wallethub.com\)](https://www.wallethub.com)

For these reasons, our report emphasizes the importance of maintaining or extending funding for the Pandemic Recovery Projects, which are key in lessening the economic negative effects of the pandemic on people of color. REAC also points out to the need to gather, analyze, and assess data on programs designed to address economic disparities. The results of this data gathering should be used to identify specific areas where program improvements and enhancements can be made and funding increased or reallocated from initiatives that are no longer working. These programs include Pathways, Basic Income Pilot Program, efforts toward Housing Reparations, and expansion of Higher Education in Correctional Facilities.

At the intersection of education and health, our committee on youth mental health worked to understand the magnitude of the epidemic of mental health. Not addressing the severity of this issue could have lasting and even irreversible consequences for the future of our youth of color. Additionally, there could be an increase of disparities in multiple domains if our youth do not receive the support they need. Youth may drop out of school, be incarcerated, or not be able to reach their full potential, denying our community of their valuable and unique

contributions. This would be nothing short of tragic. In our recommendations, we encourage Hennepin County to focus on mental health professional development, and that policies and initiatives pay close attention to intersectionality of race and gender identity and sexual orientation. Lastly, as new resources may be made available to screen for mental health at school, we recommend those funds be allocated with the goal of disparity reduction in this area, in particular for Black, Hispanic and Native American youth seeking support for their mental health.

The Progress and Review committee encourages Hennepin County to devote significant attention to the civic engagement domain, especially considering the upcoming voting season. This would support a positive sense of belonging and participation, key to healthy communities.

### Closing statement

As we finish this year's report, we are grateful for the space and hospitality we have found at North Point Conference Center and for the countless hours of support and collaboration that Hennepin County staff has provided to REAC members. We would also like to extend our gratitude to Commissioner Fernando, County Attorney Mary Moriarty, Sheriff Witt, Office of Workforce Development Director Nola Slagter, and Jen Albrecht for their generosity with their time and expertise. They took the time to present their work through the lens of racial disparity reduction. We would also like to thank the commissioners who designated REAC members and to the many Hennepin County staff members who met with us and helped us better understand our areas of focus.

Throughout the last 12 months, REAC has approached the issue of racial disparities from different perspectives, but we are unified in the belief that we can and must eliminate them. This change will happen when we address the structural components that shape and maintain racial disparities. These structural components often naturalize racial disparities, making them part of "business as usual." In our meetings, conversations, interviews and presentations, it was clear again and again that the traumatizing effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and police brutality and violence have left a lasting mark in our community. REAC acknowledges that County Administration is still working on funding priorities, however that REAC is asking the County Board to consider continued funding of successful priorities, programs and services enacted during the pandemic. The residents of Hennepin County and our youth especially still need support and initiatives that will help us move forward and realize our professed values. You have the power to bring political action to make the necessary changes happen. We hope that our efforts will be supportive in guiding your next steps.

# Recommendations

## Income Committee

### A. Pandemic recovery projects

#### **A1. Pandemic recovery project – Employment and training services for people exiting homelessness**

The purpose of the employment and training services for people exiting homelessness pilot program is to provide employment and training services and support to single adults experiencing or recently exiting homelessness with the goal of providing employment opportunities that will support stable permanent housing.

#### **A2. Pandemic recovery project – Workforce development roster program**

The workforce development roster program is an innovative approach to partnering with community-based organizations – that include a strong partnership with businesses – to provide workforce development services to residents impacted by the pandemic.

#### **A3. Pandemic recovery project – Workforce Leadership Council**

The Workforce Leadership Council is the platform the county will use to convene regional employers as well as education and non-profit partners for cross-sector share of ideas, promising practices, and resources. The goal is to build strong partnerships to examine post-pandemic trends to help inform and prepare the current and future workforce.

#### **The problem**

These programs show promise; however, the funding for these projects is ending. Continuation of the pandemic recovery projects will allow more variability in how funds are used, allow for creativity and improved uses of funds, and enable more adaptability to modify programs that are ineffective.

#### **Recommendations**

- REAC requests that the programs provide data and results of progress as they continue.

- Extend funding for the pandemic recovery projects to provide continued support these projects offer, lessening the negative effects of the pandemic on people of color.
- Gather, analyze, and assess data of these programs. Use the results of this data to identify specific areas where program improvements and enhancements can be made and funding increased or reallocated from initiatives that are no longer working.

### B. Hennepin Pathways Program

#### **Current program description**

Through the Hennepin Pathways Program, employers may develop diverse pools of high potential applicants. It is a unique collaboration between regional employers, educators, community partners, and Hennepin County.

Program graduates have multiple paths to choose from and are employed countywide in office administration, human services, and building operations. These pathways are meeting county hiring needs while also connecting job seekers with meaningful work, livable wages, benefits, and career growth. Since 2014, Hennepin County has hired more than 350 graduates from Pathways programs. This program serves as a talent pipeline for Hennepin County and other employers.

Hennepin County is an active partner in establishing the prerequisites for participant enrollment, curriculum, training, and job classifications approved for each program. Each program has specific requirements that participants must meet prior to admittance into the training. Participants interview to be accepted into the program and are evaluated at different stages. They must meet certain standards in order to graduate and be recommended for hire. Pathways programs are designed to train people in needed fields and provide training, work experience, and support.

Current programs include: building operations technician, human resources representative, office specialist, and operator apprenticeship. The building operations technician opportunity includes a partnership with Project in Pride for Living and Minneapolis College where participants are prepared for careers in facilities engineering, operations, and maintenance. The human services representative opportunity includes training for a position with Hennepin County and is offered in partnership with Project for Pride in Living and Normandale Community College. The office specialist opportunity includes training through a partnership with Project for Pride in Living focusing on developing existing customer service and administrative skills. The operator apprenticeship is with Hennepin Energy Recovery Center (HERC) and includes a nine-month apprenticeship program, offered in partnership with



Project for Pride in Living and Heavy Metal Academy. Operator apprenticeship graduates are prepared for careers in heavy equipment operation, facilities, and maintenance. Two new opportunities are in the process of being added to include positions related to appraiser and medical examiner.

**Pathways data from 2023**



367 Hired



111 Promoted

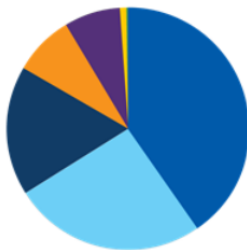


92% Retained for 1 year

**Pathways hires come from diverse backgrounds**

Hires come from a wide range of ages and backgrounds, including recent immigrants, multilingual, LGBTQIA, and veterans.

**Racial demographics of Pathways hires**



- 40.38% Black or African American
- 25.82% White
- 17.31% Asian
- 7.97% did not specify
- 7.42% Hispanic/Latino
- 0.82% American Indian/Alaska Native
- 0.27% Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander

## Community impact

Data below is provided by the community partners facilitating the pathway programs. It represents the total number of participants enrolled in programs and the total number of graduates. It is organized by year and includes ethnic demographics.

	Participants				Graduates			
	Total	% People of Color	% White	% Not Specified	Total	% People of Color	% White	% Not Specified
2014	30	53%	33%	13%	20	45%	35%	20%
2015	78	63%	31%	6%	68	64%	34%	2%
2016	188	63%	34%	3%	127	58%	39%	4%
2017	217	79%	20%	1%	189	77%	22%	1%
2018	199	73%	27%	0%	176	73%	28%	0%
2019	117	76%	23%	1%	89	88%	12%	0%
2020	80	79%	21%	0%	65	74%	26%	0%
2021	29	66%	34 %	0%	25	68%	32%	0%
2022	64	78.12%	18.75%	3.12%	30	76.66%	20%	3.33%
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>1,002</b>	<b>Participants enrolled in pathway programs</b>			<b>789</b>	<b>Graduates of pathway programs</b>		

### Recommendations

The Pathways Program has worked to hire people of color and provide training, professional development, and full-time employment placement. In the past, Pathways included more options for careers, leading to more hiring and employment placement. We recommend the Pathways Program be expanded to include more opportunities for training and employment. Specifically, we recommend Pathways offer more training options and full-time employment opportunities for applicants.

The Pathways Program has great potential to have a meaningful impact on the community, yet this impact can only increase through robust and strategic engagement activities. REAC suggests that engagement increases on two fronts: communities these programs aim to serve and local organizations that can become new partners with Hennepin County.

Additionally, REAC proposes more robust ongoing review and data analysis of the existing programs to assess what is working well and what could be improved. We believe this is the best way forward in successfully expanding the Pathways Program. Such data analysis and evaluation would provide Hennepin County with critical insight into how the current funding dollars can be best applied moving forward and guarantee these programs have the most meaningful impact possible on the communities that need it most. For example, in 2018, participant involvement was at its highest with 199 participants and 88% of participants graduating. While the graduation rates hovered between 76% and 86%, the number of participants was drastically reduced in 2021 with a slight increase in 2022. What accounts for this drastic decrease? At the same time, the graduation rate also dropped from 86% to 46%. What accounts for these changes?

Specific recommendations:

- Gather, analyze, and assess data on:
  - **Program engagement** to provide Hennepin County with insight into the success and needs for improvement in engagement activities. Use the data gathered to aggressively communicate and educate the community of the benefits of the program.
  - **Program funding:** Evaluate the various funding streams for Pathways, including the amounts of funding and how these dollars are utilized across the different programs. Use this evaluation to identify specific areas where funding may need to be rerouted or increased.
  - **Pathway's impact on specific communities** and use this data analysis to determine success and needs for improvement when addressing racial disparities.

- Implement strategic engagement initiatives that could increase participation. For example:
  - **Aggressively advertise and market to the communities in need**, highlighting Pathways as a program that supports, educates, trains, hires, and employs more people of color.
  - **Increase and expand partnerships with Pathways**, including with vocational and educational organizations.

### C. Benefits Cliff and Guaranteed Basic Income pilot programs

Income inequality, along with the unequal distribution of income, is the result of social and economic forces. As a direct result of income inequality, certain communities are required to reach for public assistance to meet the required expenses to support access to everyday needs and services. This leads to the very real consideration of a benefits cliff, where there is a disincentive to achieve a higher income due to a possible denial of access to public assistance resulting in a net loss, even at a higher rate of income (Richardson & Blizard, 2022).

[Richardson, C., & Blizard, Z. (2022). Benefits cliffs, disincentive deserts, and economic mobility. *Journal of Poverty*, 26(1), 1-22.]

Hennepin County has recently launched two pilot programs:

1. Guaranteed Basic Income Pilot launched in July of 2023
2. Benefits Cliff Pilot including data gathering which addresses solutions to the problem of a benefits cliff

### Recommendations

- As both of these pilot programs are in their early stages and data is being gathered to inform future direction and success, REAC recommends that the data gathering be robust in focus and in scope. It is important that the data answers the following questions:
  - Which specific communities are being engaged with this program and how are each of those communities benefitting or being challenged by this program?
  - What barriers keep a participant from fully benefiting from the program offerings?
- Collect, analyze, and assess data on how specific communities are engaged and the benefits or challenges these communities face with these pilot programs. Data collection should be robust and ongoing in focus and in scope to specifically identify the community of people being addressed.

## D. Housing reparations

Housing racial covenants, redlining, and predatory lending practices in Hennepin County created and expanded racial disparities for communities of color. These practices limited opportunities for home ownership, decreased resources in employment, health, education, and transportation for people of color, thereby expanding the racial wealth gap. It is estimated that 1.239 quintillion dollars are owed to Black people stemming from housing discriminatory practices (Kim, 2019).

Discriminatory housing practices with racial covenants in Hennepin County were researched and documented by the Mapping Prejudice Project. With this research and documentation, work can begin to restore and repair the damage caused by these practices.

### Recommendations

REAC recommends the implementation of county housing reparations for people of color and groups who have been harmed by discriminatory housing practices. These practices have decreased wealth in those groups and increased wealth for white people. Housing reparations are a vital step toward rectifying the deeply ingrained injustices stemming from discriminatory housing practices. Redlining systematically denied access to housing and economic opportunities for minority communities, perpetuating racial disparities for generations. County housing reparations can serve as a powerful tool for addressing this historical wrongdoing by providing financial and housing support to those who have been disproportionately affected. By allocating resources to assist marginalized communities in accessing quality housing, these reparations can promote economic stability, equalize opportunities, build generational wealth, and contribute to the broader goal of achieving social justice and equity. It is not just a moral imperative but also a practical necessity to undo the enduring harm caused by discriminatory housing practices and move toward a more equitable future. According to Kenneth T. Jackson, "no agency of the United States government has had a more pervasive and powerful impact on the American people over the past half-century than the Federal Housing Administration" (Kim, 2019, p. 155). [Kim, J. (2019). Black reparations for twentieth century federal housing discrimination: the construction of white wealth and the effects of denied black homeownership. *Boston University Public Interest Law Journal*, 29(1), 135-168.]

- According to Kim (2019), "reparations could come in the form of both money and new policies that target the detrimental effects of the original harm" (p. 166). Hennepin County should implement county housing reparations for people of color and groups who have been harmed by discriminatory housing practices. These reparation programs should include:

- Interventions that support homeownership for people of color through down payment grants
- Housing revitalization grants
- Access to government subsidized mortgages with very low interest rates and low or no down payment
- Formal apologies and acknowledgement to the community of historical injustice and its current results

### E. Correctional facility higher education expansion

Many Hennepin County residents are housed at correctional facilities outside of the county in neighboring counties, yet many of these individuals, once released, will return to Hennepin County to seek jobs where they lived previously (James, 2015). [James, N. (January 12, 2015). Offender Reentry: Correctional Statistics, Reintegration into the Community, and Recidivism. Congressional Research Service. <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/RL34287.pdf>] Gaining an education while incarcerated leads to decreased recidivism and increased income potential. A study found that individuals who participated in educational programs while in jail were up to 43% less likely to reoffend and return to prison (James, 2023). [James, D. (May 2, 2023). MN program providing incarcerated students chance to earn diplomas graduates newest class. CBS News Minnesota. <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/mn-program-providing-incarcerated-students-chance-to-earn-diplomas-graduates-newest-class/>]

Currently, college education programs are offered to *some* incarcerated individuals at Lino Lakes, Stillwater, and Faribault Correctional Facilities. Of these locations, there are more than 200 full time students. Together, these three correctional facilities have a capacity of more than 3,800 men. Additionally, there are other correctional facilities nearby where this program could expand.

The Transformation and Reentry through Education and Community (TREC) program offers courses through a collaboration of Minneapolis College, Metropolitan State University, and the University of Minnesota. Expanding college education within correctional facilities is a transformative and forward-thinking policy recommendation. Providing access to higher education for incarcerated individuals offers a unique opportunity for rehabilitation and reintegration into society. By offering college courses in correctional facilities, individuals are empowered with the knowledge and skills they need to break the cycle of incarceration, recidivism rates are reduced, and safer communities are possible. Education fosters personal growth, critical thinking, and a sense of purpose, which are essential for people to rebuild their lives upon release. Education is also a cost-effective approach, as the investment in education pales in comparison to the expenses associated with repeated incarceration.

Expanding college education in correctional facilities not only benefits people seeking a second chance, but also society as a whole by fostering a more inclusive and productive group of citizens.

The TREC program is doing well and graduating students. More growth is possible with more funding. Funding currently is provided to this program from multiple sources including: Ascendium, Jobs for Future, Minneapolis College Foundation, U.S. Department of Education's Second Chance Pell, and Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). A recent DEED grant is expanding the services offered for reentry. An investment from Hennepin County ensures we care about the safety of our citizens and chooses to better the lives of people who live and work in our county currently and in the future. Many people leaving incarceration in Minnesota return to Hennepin County to be near family and/or to seek out increased job opportunities in the metropolitan area. There is room for more expansion in Minnesota's correctional facilities as more than 80% of people incarcerated meet the criteria to join TREC.

### **Recommendations**

Expand the TREC program with increased funding from Hennepin County.

- Increase funding for services related to reentry to better support students as they transition to continue college outside of the correctional facility. This funding will allow for education and living expenses to help with housing and basic needs, employment, and support services, such as a reentry coordinator, to assist with transition.
- Expand the higher education programs at Lino Lakes, Stillwater, and Faribault Correctional Facilities to include additional classes for more eligible students.
- Add a program in the Red Wing Correctional Facility, which is also near Hennepin County.

## REAC mental health

A number of official data sets and journalistic reports have presented significant evidence of a youth mental health crisis. For example:

- High school students with depression are more than 2x more likely to drop out than their peers
- 59.3% of Minnesotans age 12–17 who have depression did not receive any care in the last year ([Nami Report](#))

Compared with adult services, mental health services for youth are less centralized.

Frances Matthews report that “Even without a centralized clinic, youth in Hennepin County have a system to support them, which is especially important to have after the events of the COVID-19 pandemic” ([Hennepin County helps teens struggling with mental health](#)). This is particularly true for youth of color, who experienced the trauma of the murder of George Floyd and the loss and anxiety that came with the COVID-19 pandemic. These events disproportionately affected communities of color, adding to the realities of discrimination and violence that come with racialization.

The COVID-19 pandemic may have ended, but it is important we consider the lasting effects the pandemic had on youth mental health. In discussing the latest Minnesota Student Survey, Minnesota Education Commissioner Heather Mueller underscored that “this year’s survey reveals a clear picture of the continuing need to support student mental and behavioral health. The Department of Education is dedicated to working together with other educators, agencies, and our school communities to better meet the academic, mental health and behavioral health needs of our students so they can be successful in school and beyond.” ([2022 Student Survey Results, Official Press Release](#)).

It is equally important that steps are taken to help dismantle the systems that have created and naturalized racial disparities in the area of mental health for our youth of color.

We propose recommendations in professional development with attention to intersectionality and devoting resources to the specific needs of youth of color.

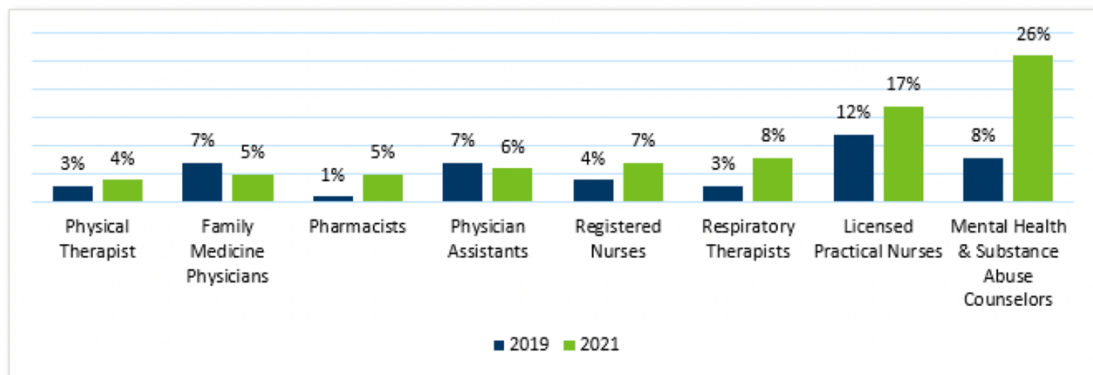
### A. Mental health professionals

The latest report on Minnesota’s Health Care Workforce ([Minnesota’s Health care Workforce: Pandemic-provoked workforce exits, burnout, and shortages](#)) warns that while the number of health professionals licensed to practice in Minnesota has seen modest increases, this number



may, in fact, conceal “a great deal of turbulence under the surface.” Vacancies in the health profession have continued their upward trend: “Perhaps most alarming is the sharp rise in vacancies for mental health and substance abuse counselors: for every 100 jobs in this profession, 26 are currently open. This increase is perhaps reflective of the so-called ‘second wave’ or ‘second pandemic’ — the mental health pandemic resulting from anxiety, stress, depression, and other disorders brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.” The first and main recommendation of that report is to move forward concrete measures to improve labor conditions: “Health care workers need more than appreciation; employers must do more to address burnout. Jobs should be as safe, flexible, lucrative, and family-friendly as possible.” We agree with this recommendation.

**Figure 1. Job vacancy rates in select health care occupations, 2019 and 2021**



Data source: Department of Employment and Economic Development Job Vacancy Survey; second quarter 2019 and second quarter 2021 vacancy rates.

## Recommendations

To ensure that jobs in mental health are as safe, flexible, lucrative, and family-friendly as possible. Create a culture of care around mental health professionals.

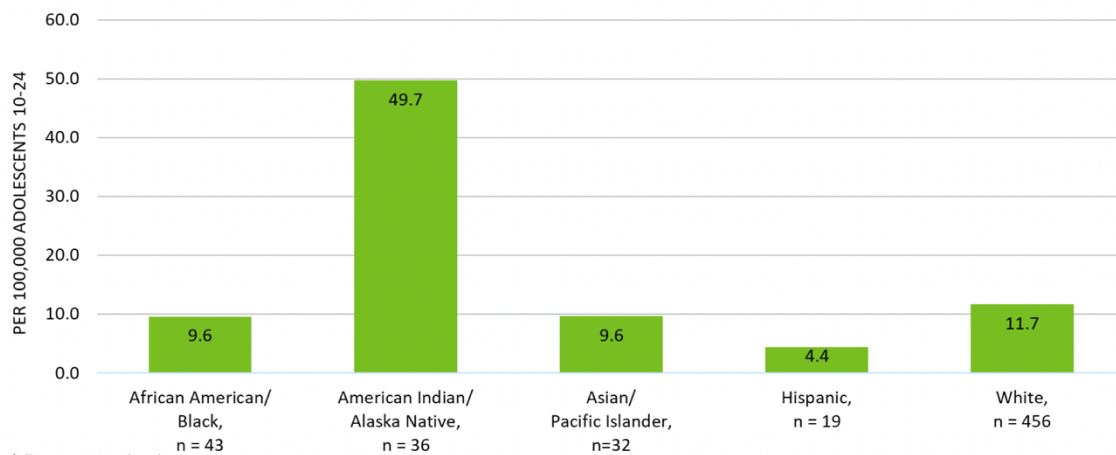
It is important to be intentional in developing mental health professionals who are culturally proficient and can address racial trauma. It is also important to develop professionals who are aware of different models beyond westernized medicine and are able to articulate culturally-appropriate messaging around mental health resources.

To continue to develop data collection strategies that will ensure continuity in the mental health professionals’ pipeline. This is especially important to keep track of the reasons for resignation, and where departing staff are taking their talents and expertise.

## B. Racial disparities and their intersectionality with gender

Racial disparities are evident and structural when it comes to addressing mental health needs in racialized youth. For example, at the national level, 7 in 10 youth in the juvenile justice system have a mental health condition. In Minnesota, youth of color are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system: 12.3% are Black, 1.6% are American Indian and 9.2% are Hispanic, while the same groups represent 6.5%, 0.8%, and 5.6% in the total of Minnesota population, respectively. Adolescent suicide, which is preventable and increasing in Minnesota, is also not experienced equally across racial and ethnic lines. There are large disparities that should inform decisions taken to address and eliminate adolescent suicide.

**Figure 2. Suicide Rate by Race/Ethnicity among Minnesota Adolescents (10-24 years old), 2015-2019**



Source: Minnesota Resident Final Death File and US Census, American Community Survey Population Estimates

Consideration should be given to the intersection of compounding factors such as gender (the suicide rate of males is four times that of females between the ages of 15-19) and sexual orientation, with LGBTQ+ youth reporting higher rates of suicidal ideation and suicide attempts than heterosexual and cisgender youth according to the 2021 Division of Child and Family Health Minnesota Department of Health report ["Adolescent Suicide" MN Department of Health](#).

The importance of gender identity and the compounding effects this dimension can bring to our youth of color cannot be understated. The pandemic may be over, but the effects on youth are still measurable, palpable and troublesome. The report, ["Key Findings- Brooklyn Bridge Alliance – Youth to Youth 2022 Survey"](#), found that "a little over half (52%) of youth reported that they still felt the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The top ways that they felt

the impact were falling behind academically during online schooling, their social relationships were not back to normal, poor mental health, and difficulty re-adjusting to school in-person. The disaggregated data shows that some groups of youth (female, older, LGBTQ+) have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic more than others.”

We believe that the [See Mental Health](#) initiative and [Reimagine Black Youth Mental Health](#) represent steps in the right direction and are examples of positive partnerships for Hennepin County in this area.

Christa Mims, Director of Hennepin County’s Education Support Services, also added to our understanding of the issues by reminding us of the experience of social isolation and loneliness that youth of color are facing. Christa Mims, Director of Hennepin County’s Education Support Services, also added to our understanding of the issues by reminding us of the experience of social isolation and loneliness that youth of color are facing. This is captured by the above-mentioned report, “Key Findings- Brooklyn Bridge Alliance – Youth to Youth 2022 Survey, where youth of color express greater challenges in feeling a sense of belonging and acceptance within their own communities.

### **Recommendations**

To ensure that gender identity and sexual orientation are considered in decisions related to the mental health of our younger community members, especially for youth who experience the intersection of being racialized and members of a minoritized gender identity group.

To develop communications that address mental health and connect youth to services containing intentional and positive representations of trans and queer youth of color.

To further research and develop programs that will effectively address social isolation and loneliness of BIPOC youth, which are risk factors for mental health needs. This research and development should also take into account how racialized identities intersect with gender.

### **C. Strategic use of resources to combat racial disparities**

We consider it a positive development that educators will potentially receive more resources during this legislative cycle to screen for mental health needs in K-12 students. In [Minnesota](#), pending legislation would require mental health screening for students and provide revenue to school districts and charter schools to hire student mental health support staff ([Report of the National Conference of State Legislatures](#)). This could be a step forward to develop screening services tied to education and to bring much needed services to a larger percentage of youth. These efforts must be made with a constant and strategic prioritization of resources that will effectively address the historically-constructed and structurally-

neglected needs of youth of color, who are suffering disproportionality from incarceration, the impact of the pandemic, and community trauma.

### **Recommendation**

To ensure that racial disparity reduction comes front and center as schools receive more resources to screen and address mental health needs.

## Progress and review

The REAC Report for **2021** made recommendations to improve Hennepin County's racial equity for all of its residents within the domains of education, employment, income, health, housing, transportation and justice. The REAC Report for **2022** re-emphasized recommendations within three of the previously identified domains of health, housing and justice.

In **2023**, as part of its ongoing obligation and commitment to identify recommendations addressing racial inequities throughout Hennepin County, REAC approved the formation of the Progress and Review Subcommittee. The purpose of this subcommittee is to review prior recommendations made by REAC and report on progress, especially as it relates to addressing racial inequity in Hennepin County. This subcommittee will also provide direction and strategic focus for REAC and Hennepin County staff and leadership as it changes from year-to-year. Overall, it will serve to improve accountability and consistency for the work done by successors. The **2024** annual REAC Report will highlight the committee's first round of progress and review.

In light of the upcoming voting season, the Progress and Review Subcommittee does recommend that significant attention is given to the civic engagement domain. The subcommittee highly recommends that Hennepin County commissioners provide funding for initiatives to support voter education, registration, and engagement. It is our recommendation that these initiatives are carried out in partnership with community organizations, specifically those that reflect the racial composition of stakeholders. Community organizations may include but are not limited to: League of Women Voters MN; Catholic Charities; Lutheran Social Services; Islamic Civic Society; Center for Leadership in Neighborhoods; and well as others referenced in the Hennepin County Annual Report – Pandemic Response Projects July 2022-June 2023, Voter Participation Project. Additionally, we recommend that initiatives are targeted to “communities who have historically faced the highest barriers to voting,” particularly focused on:

- A. Incentives for voter engagement training and information sessions

- B. Accessibility and understanding of absentee ballots
- C. Registration accessibility and support for homeless and highly mobile youth and adults, as well as those in out of home placements (i.e., foster care, residential treatment centers, juvenile detention centers, medical facilities, rehabilitation facilities)
- D. Expedited registration for newly eligible voters (i.e., those convicted of a felony who are now eligible voters)
- E. Transportation services to and from voting sites
- F. Opportunities for childcare services at voting sites

# Appendixes and Resources

