

A blue-tinted photograph of a city skyline with several skyscrapers of varying heights and architectural styles. The sky is a clear, light blue.

# Hennepin County Board resolution 20-0242 declares racism a public health crisis that affects the entire county- a response

The reality is that persistent disparities separate people who are not thriving in Hennepin County from those who are.

We see disparities every day, in the places our critical support services are serving people who are not faring well. And we recognize our obligation to work toward eliminating disparities by whatever means we have.

This work is not new. Much of the “business” of Hennepin County has been about responding to and lifting up people in the midst of true needs. Individual programs and initiatives within workforce and economic development, housing, health, child and adult welfare reform, environmental protection, justice and infrastructure improvement have long sought to intervene at the root of people’s needs. What is new is a sharpened focus of eliminating disparities within the county. Where we recognize momentum and success in existing efforts to bridge disparity divides,

we will fortify our investment. Where our work has unintentionally perpetuated disparities, especially for people of color, we will change course. Reducing any individual disparity can leverage positive change and help reduce disparities in other areas.

In Hennepin County, inequities in education, employment, health, housing, income, justice and transportation are starkest between residents of color and their White counterparts. When we start our work from this shared perspective, shifting our guiding lens to one that is focused and committed to addressing these disparities, we can see the places, partnerships, programs and services where we have a responsibility to act. Acknowledging that this is both true and unacceptable is just the beginning.

As we advance the work, we are using an innovation framework model that puts the people we serve at the center. We've formalized and prioritized strategic engagement within Hennepin County in order to maintain clear and open channels with communities. Program, policy, procedure and partnership decisions are made with the direct participation of members of the groups. Our work is guided by the racial equity impact tool

developed by Government Alliance on Race and Equity. The tool is designed to help set benchmarks, foster learning and collaborate with other local organizations.

This report is in response to declaring racism a public health crisis, communicate our work to reduce disparities, support race equity and share our vision for how we'll continue to do this work in the future.

## Hennepin County's policy position will include advocating for relevant policies that improve health in Black communities, Indigenous communities, and communities of color

Hennepin County's disparity reduction strategy includes advocating for relevant policies that improve health in Black communities, Indigenous communities and communities of color. Currently, we are working toward achieving 21 disparity reduction priorities, three in each of our disparity reduction domains of education, employment, health, housing, income, justice and transportation.

Our 21 priorities put the needs of Black, Indigenous and communities of color in the center of the priority work. To help us focus the impact of system change on communities of color, we adopted and are guided by a Racial Equity Impact Tool. Coupled with our domains, which are in and of themselves social determinants of health, we believe that we are working toward improving the health of all residents, particularly communities of color that have more negative health outcomes than their White counterparts.

Since 2017, when the Hennepin County Board reviewed data that showed how disparities in the seven disparity reduction domain areas ultimately drive the work of the county, we have created organizational structure, assigned resources and adopted new practices to intentionally reduce disparities and build equity. Now, when we start a contract, hire and onboard new staff, or create policies or programs, we use a lens of disparity reduction and equity.

This memo describes much, but not all, of the work that our organization has taken to achieve the goal. We know there is more work to do.

Thank you for your support.

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# Disparity Reduction

## 2013 - present

Since 2015, we've made reducing disparities a central part of our mission, to create a proactive approach in identifying needs, addressing gaps and providing opportunities for our residents.

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### Serving residents

- 2013 ● Our North Star - serving residents**

A reenergizing of our focus on serving residents was initiated across the organization. Branding this motto created a common theme to unite staff across all departments with a focus on the customer and resident.
- 2015 ● Creation of core values**

The county created a framework of core values as a model for excellence and accountability for the way we serve residents and deliver services. The core values are Continuous Improvement, Customer Service, Diversity and Inclusion, Employee Engagement, and Workforce Development. These values are foundational and are included in staff performance reviews.

  - Disparity Reduction project**

The initial disparity reduction project included data analysis and research, an environmental scan of current work across the county, identification of gaps, and employee listening sessions and engagement. This work set the stage for development of our current disparity reduction domains and priorities.
- 2016 ● Continued discovery work**

Environmental scan of ongoing work across the county, identification of gaps and employee listening sessions and engagement.
- 2017 ● Identification of Disparity Reduction domains**

A board retreat set the stage for weaving disparity reduction into the county's mission, vision and overarching goals. The retreat addressed current challenges while positioning the county for the future. A total of seven disparity reduction domains were identified. They are education, employment, health, housing, income, justice and transportation. A theory of change was introduced that outlined a broad spectrum of actions and initiatives the county was taking as both a service provider and employer.
- 2018 ● Disparity Reduction matures**

Disparity Reduction domain team development occurs, Disparity Reduction Governance Board launched and domain priorities identified. Cross-domain collaborations resulted in strong relationships, innovative thinking and proactive strategies and actions to reduce disparities.

# 2019



## **Advancing Racial Equity training required for all staff**

In 2019 the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion division coordinated the countywide delivery of the Advancing Racial Equity training. This four-hour, classroom-based training helped employees gain awareness, develop skills and be positioned to apply the learning in their work. More than 95% of Hennepin County staff have been trained to understand the combination of values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and expertise that guide us to respect, be sensitive to and aware of the uniqueness of each person we serve, so our services are inclusive to all, regardless of race or culture.



## **Priorities begin working through Racial Equity Impact Tool**

After domains were identified, leads were assigned across the organization with the charge of creating workplans and engaging residents and stakeholders. The goal was to develop community indicators and measure results while redesigning policies and programs. The Racial Equity Impact Tool, adapted from the Government Alliance on Race and Equity, guided the work.



## **County Board creates Race Equity Advisory Council**

In December 2019 the board created the Race Equity Advisory Council. The council is composed of 15 residents. Its mission is to strengthen the county's goal of disparity reduction and to advise the county board and administration on the county's vision and strategy. Due to COVID-19, the kickoff was delayed until August 2020.

# 2020



## **Disparity Reduction Line of Business**

In January 2020 a new line of business was formed to intentionally provide direction and strategy to foster institutional change to reduce racial disparities in Hennepin County. There are three departments within the Disparity Reduction line of business: Center of Innovation and Excellence; Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and Purchasing and Contracting Services. The mission of this line of business is to partner, frame and adopt equitable practices in education, employment, health, housing, income, justice and transportation across Hennepin County. Staff educate, facilitate, train and analyze data to complete priority goals in the community and workplace.



## **County Board declares racism a public health crisis**

In June 2020 the Hennepin County board passed a resolution that declares racism as a public health crisis that affects the entire county. This declaration supports the county's foundational work to develop strategies that mitigate personal bias and prejudice in the community, create systems that build equity and create a future where all residents are healthy and successful and all communities thrive. Hennepin County will support local, regional, state and federal initiatives that advance efforts to dismantle systemic racism and seek partnership with local organizations that have a legacy and track record of confronting racism. The county will promote community efforts to amplify issues of racism that engage actively and authentically with communities of color.

## Education

Relationships, connections and collaborations drive the work of the education domain. The team works to increase school stability and consistency for youth of color involved in county systems. This has become particularly important as the need for educational supports during the COVID-19 pandemic increased.

We're partnering with the Sauer Family Foundation, Youthrise and MN Afterschool Advance to address connectivity and computer issues that impact distance learning. This is part of work underway to deal with the digital divide, also called the homework gap. We are trying to better understand where we have concentrations of households that may have barriers to internet access and to reduce the homework gap by using our increased fiber capacity to provide high speed internet to libraries and other public facilities in areas with the highest need.

We're also providing homework help to youth through connections to a mentor or an organization that helps them remain engaged with their school. In addition, librarians are providing tutoring or homework help. Over the summer, we partnered with Huntington Learning Center to provide support to youth so they wouldn't fall behind academically; this work will continue into the fall.

For children experiencing instability, school is a place of safety and stability. County services are working with schools to move upstream toward early intervention as opposed to deep-end intensive services by adopting practices that prioritize educational stability and integrated education partnerships. We're supporting educational stability for youth involved in county systems, including child protection, foster care, juvenile probation, and teen and pregnant parents, by incorporating education goals into their standards of practice.

## Employment

The employment domain is focused on targeted recruitment to increase hiring opportunities at entry and leadership levels. The Pathways Program is an effort to increase entry-level opportunities for people of color. A recent study of the program showed that 72% of Pathways participants are people of color, represented predominantly by Black participants who made up 47% of the study population.

The study also showed 65% of Pathways participants were enrolled in food, cash or Medical Assistance one year before finishing the program. A year after finishing the program, that number decreased to about one-third. Total monthly expenditures on public assistance payments for the Pathways' participants decreased from about \$108,000 during the 12 months before finishing the program to just under \$58,000 one year post-Pathways. The majority of remaining public assistance is Medical Assistance. Pathways has clear evidence of return on investment.



## Health

The health domain is focused on increasing access to culturally responsive mental health services. The team supports work that develops these systems in partnership with residents, healthcare providers and systems. We believe that by improving access to culturally responsive mental health services, more residents of color will receive needed services in a timely manner, be better able to adhere to treatment, and will be able to remain in care.

Disparity reduction is infused throughout the work of the health line of business. Hennepin Health, Minnesota’s only county-owned and operated health maintenance organization, has disparity reduction at the heart of its vision to “change how we build healthy, equitable communities.” Hennepin Health offers Prepaid Medical Assistance Program, Special Needs BasicCare and MinnesotaCare products to eligible Hennepin County residents. Hennepin Health serves a membership that is disproportionately people of color. Disparity reduction is throughout much of our work, for example our social service navigation work and award-winning community care management initiation for inpatient members experiencing homelessness. Other representative examples of this work include:

- Targeted provider outreach and contracting to increase access to culturally competent behavioral health services to ensure that the Hennepin Health provider network is able to meet the needs of our diverse membership;
- Investing in the training of Black doulas through the Cultural Wellness Center and Hennepin Healthcare to expand the provider base of trained, certified, and registered Black doulas who are available to support women in our community;
- Developing a culturally appropriate pre- and postnatal care model to serve the needs of high-risk families in cooperation with NorthPoint Health & Wellness Center, Hennepin Healthcare, Human Services and Public Health;
- Funding the Karibu Mama Mtoto psychotherapy support group for at-risk pregnant and new mothers to teach positive coping behaviors, self-regulation and child management skills and to cultivate secure family attachments;
- Focusing efforts to increase dental utilization and respond to COVID-19, using a racial equity impact lens, resulting in an approximately 7% increase in dental utilization for kids ages 1-20 during 2018; and
- Co-locating a multi-disciplinary team at the Hennepin Healthcare Access Clinic to reduce barriers to access medical, behavioral health, dental and social services.



## Housing

The housing domain team is focused on improving stable financing options. Hennepin County's Five-Year Consolidated Plan for housing and community development recognizes strategies to reduce disparate impacts on people of color in activities funded through that \$4.5M grant. Implementation of the supportive housing capital program addressing priority populations is also underway, and housing RFPs include strategies to address housing barriers beyond income.

Other examples of this work, guided by the Racial Equity Impact Tool, include:

- Successfully implementing the first year of a 10-year plan to create 1,000 units of supportive housing for priority populations of residents, among whom people of color are disproportionately represented.
- Awarding \$6 million for 212 units of supportive housing for people experiencing chronic homelessness and people with

severe addictions. This cross-departmental work represents a significant shift in housing development (including both Housing and Economic Development and Human Services), early-in, and directed by the county's priorities for vulnerable residents.

- Immediate action was taken to discontinue use of a housing prioritization tool that was determined to have racial bias. We are entering into a new contract with the Center for Social Innovation as part of their Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities project to help design, test and implement a new, equitable assessment tool and to enhance current assessment procedures to ensure racial equity.
- Creating the Tenant Resource Center for residents looking for assistance in housing and other services, thanks to a partnership with the Pohlad Foundation.



## Income

The income domain vision for fee reform is a future where county fees and related processes do not cause a disproportionate burden on people of color and low-income groups but rather improve their incomes by reforming fees that impact individual/unit economic well-being and advance racial equity for all customers and residents. The income domain seeks to build self-sufficiency and aim to avoid prolonged or escalated system involvement through the imposition of fees.



## Justice

Justice involves many systems, so the justice domain is focusing on bringing areas together for a common goal. This past year, they have brought together the Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation (DOCCR), the courts, the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office and many others to work on disparity reduction goals, particularly probation reform. Black and Indigenous men are disproportionately represented on probation and in our correctional system.

We are working toward early discharge as an incentive to meet other probation conditions, increasing the utilization of providers to aid clients in meeting early discharge, determining options in which work hours can be substituted for restitution payment, and implementing client-centered approaches in early discharge practices.



## Transportation

The transportation domain team is focused on strengthening infrastructure through ongoing investment, and they're implementing a disparity reduction lens into their day-to-day work across Public Works, which includes:

- Working with Purchasing and Contracting Services to increase contracting opportunities for small, minority and women-owned businesses.
- Ensuring appropriate consideration is given to a project's impact in concentrated areas of people of color and people in poverty by reviewing and refining capital project evaluation criteria.
- Ensuring appropriate consideration is given when evaluating maintenance work to infrastructure conditions in concentrated areas of people of color and people in poverty.
- Designing projects and writing contracts so appropriate consideration is given to the environments in which improvements are to occur. The goal is improved outcomes at both the human and environmental levels.

As part of the Advanced Transportation Management System (ATMS), Hennepin is replacing the county's signal operation management software and communications. Through feedback and collaboration, a new vision emerged: the development of a county fiber optic backbone. In close coordination between Community Connectivity and IT, a fiber optic network was designed, and the fiber backbone started taking shape. The ongoing ATMS efforts not only connect new signals but provide pathways for other Hennepin services (e.g., libraries, human services, medical examiner, recycling center, home school, etc.), but 75% of the fiber capacity installed under ATMS is designated for greater Hennepin County use.

In the future, the ATMS project will add nearly 200 miles of fiber optic routes to the county's expanding fiber network. The ATMS project and its technology provides specific tools such as high definition cameras and highspeed communications that allow us to collect data to better understand how people are moving. The county's video data analysis tools will ultimately provide safety, mode and behavior information to inform decisions and investments tailored with local data. The building of the fiber optic routes has significant potential to support our ongoing efforts to reduce disparities.

# Other reform efforts

In addition to our 21 disparity reduction priorities, several reform efforts are underway that have health implications for our residents. We are investing in disparity reduction in all of our systems.

Examples include:

## Child Protection

In our child protection system, we're working toward integrating approaches that focus on stabilizing and strengthening families and preventing harm rather than only responding to it. These strategies improve outcomes for children and families and aim to reduce the disproportional representation of Black and Indigenous children and families in the child protection system. It requires transparency and looking to families and their communities through practices like:

- Engaging community in program decisions
- Sharing decision making at critical points in casework to reduce bias
- Including extended family as the sustainable support for families
- Connecting with community-based services to address family needs now and into the future
- Using data, disaggregated by race and ethnicity, to evaluate our effectiveness

### Children and families:

- Multidisciplinary team screenings for child protection reports are being used, with the intent of reducing bias in screening decisions. In the first year, these teams involved people from other areas within the county and now community-based organizations are joining the teams.
- Family groups are the best way to develop safety plans that are sustainable, relying on extended family to help keep children safe in a manner relevant to their family culture. In the first eight months of 2020, 35% of the children in Family Group Decision Making referrals were Black and 30% of the children were multiracial. The most frequent reason

for referral was placement prevention, and 80% of the referrals included information about fathers for participation. Family groups are also used to identify relative foster care providers and help families understand and support children's needs.

- If children must be separated from their family home for safety reasons, being placed with extended family reduces the trauma of foster care. In 2019 we used relatives for foster care in 65% of all foster care days, per the Minnesota Child Welfare Data Dashboard. Currently in 2020, 70% of the Black children in out-of-home placement are with relatives; 66% of children in out-of-home placement who are multiracial are with relatives; 66% of American Indian children in out-of-home placement are with relatives.
- A pilot connecting family liaisons from a community-based organization to African American families in child protection investigations is underway. These liaisons help the family navigate the child protection process and ensure that the county fully explores alternatives to placement, that family meetings are central in case work, that relatives and fathers have important roles in child protection plans and that the family is referred to culturally responsive services to address their needs. These active efforts to prevent placement or reunify separated families quickly are part of the proposed Minnesota African American Family Preservation Act bill that has been considered by the Minnesota Legislature.
- Another pilot beginning this fall provides community outreach to American Indian families, especially those who have been in the child protection system. This outreach has the goal of building trust so that families feel safe participating in community-based services supporting American Indian families, which may reduce future child protection involvement.

## Adult Probation

The Criminal Justice Coordinating Committee sponsored the Adult Detention Initiative to create alternatives for the mentally ill; encourage probation compliance and avoid probation violation warrants; eliminate unnecessary system delays; and ensure detain-and-release decisions are made based on risk of failure to appear or threat to public safety.

To increase fairness and reduce the reliance on monetary bail, we created Warrant Forgiveness Day, the Sign & Book Release Warrant Initiative, Service Priority Indicator Revised assessment tool, Jail Expeditor review process and e-reminders. We've also changed policy to encourage probation compliance and added oversight when requesting a probation violation warrant.

### The results

- Reduced low-level misdemeanor jail bookings by more than 50%
- Reduced bench warrants by 16%
- Cleared hundreds of warrants
- Reduced failure to appear warrants by 25%

A system analysis conducted in 2018, when the pretrial jail population was increasing, prompted the creation of an integrated public safety data base that allows access to multiple criminal justice data points, helping us identify system delays and improve service delivery.

In response to COVID-19, justice partners implemented bail modification, changed probable cause review for low-level bookings, and expanded use of Electric Home Monitoring. This reduced the pretrial jail population by roughly 40%.

Realizing that one barrier in our system is transportation, which caused no shows for important court or court-related appointments, the CJCC launched a Court Ride Program. In 13 months (2019 and January 2020), 818 rides were offered to Public Defender clients; 54% of those individuals self-identified as a person of color.

## Juvenile Probation

In Juvenile Probation, we are transforming to become a more rehabilitative model for youth where we intentionally make equity a primary focus. This reform is being done in partnership with the Robert F. Kennedy Foundation, who conducted an initial Probation System Assessment.

In partnership with the Youth Justice Council, formerly known as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) steering committee, and community members, we are working to identify and implement recommendations from the Probation System Assessment that target race equity. Some specific examples of work underway include:

- Offering family group conferencing for youth transitioning back to Minneapolis Public Schools from an out-of-home placement is a new partnership with the Legal Rights Center and Minneapolis Public Schools. Our goals are reducing racial disparities, decreasing barriers and improving the transition process.
- Piloting a restorative justice disposition opportunity to shift traditional decision-making processes to deeply and meaningfully engage youth and families through a restorative practices framework. The primary focus of the pilot, which is another partnership with the Legal Rights Center, is on race equity and taking meaningful action to reduce racial disparities.
- Building a transition-age supervision model with a race equity lens to respond in a developmentally appropriate manner to young people aged 18-24 placed under adult supervision. The first cohort for the model began July 1, 2020.

## Saving housing

### Tax-Forfeited Land Navigators

Homeowners facing challenges that affect their abilities to pay taxes are at risk of losing their homes. The Navigator Program is a collaboration between Human Services and Resident and Real Estate Services that provides navigators to assist residents whose property taxes are delinquent and subject to tax-forfeiture. The navigators evaluate sustainability to stay in the property, assist in capturing equity when possible, help the family apply for human services programs and other community resources, facilitate re-housing and assist in overcoming barriers that prevent clients from dealing effectively with their delinquency or forfeiture situation.

In 2019 the navigators received 84 referrals, and 90% of the residents they worked with were able to stay in their homes. In the first six months of this year, 74 referrals were made to the Navigator Program.

## Climate Change

### Climate change action group

Our climate change action group developed a plan that puts people first to develop climate resilience and disrupt racial disparities. Climate change affects all parts of the county geographically and all residents and businesses. We also know that climate change disproportionately impacts people of color, low-income families and other vulnerable communities. Our climate action plan will address inequities and ensure our response to climate change does not make racial disparities worse.

## Transit Investment

The implementation of the County Sales and Use Tax has allowed us to make substantial investments in transit infrastructure. These investments will provide transportation alternatives and choices for numerous residents and businesses in diverse areas of the county.

### Light Rail Transit projects

In partnership with the Federal Transit Administration, the Metropolitan Council, local municipalities and community members, we serve as the primary funding source for the planning, design, construction and operation of the Green Line Extension (Southwest) Light Rail Transit and the Blue Line Extension (Bottineau) Light Rail Transit projects. Some specific examples of work underway include:

- The county's investment in the construction of the Southwest LRT project has provided thousands of job opportunities. These jobs cover a wide spectrum of backgrounds and abilities. The project has a workforce goal of 32% of hours worked by Indigenous and people of color. To date the project has had 21% of its workforce and greater than 570,000 hours filled by Indigenous and people of color.
- The Southwest LRT project civil construction contract has a disadvantaged business enterprise (DBE) goal of 16%. The contractor has currently provided 21% or over \$46 million in payments to DBE contractors. The Department of Transportation DBE Program is designed to remedy ongoing and the continuing effects of past discrimination in federally assisted highway, highway safety, transit and airport contracts nationwide. The primary goal and objective of the DBE program is to level the playing field by providing small businesses owned and controlled by socially and economically disadvantaged individuals a fair opportunity to compete for federally funded transportation contracts.
- We are continuing the planning and design of the Bottineau LRT project with a race equity lens. The inability to reach an agreement with the railroad will allow us to revisit the alignment and focus on better serving transit-dependent communities. We will consider disparity reduction and serving areas of concentrated poverty in the planning for the project.

Hennepin County will support local, state, regional, and federal initiatives that advance efforts to dismantle systemic racism; will seek partnership with local organizations that have a legacy and track record of confronting racism...

## Engaging the community and building partnerships

Hennepin County has and continues to grow partnerships with local organizations that confront racism. We work with hundreds of entities every day. The Racial Equity Impact Tool requires that we engage with community, particularly those most impacted by a policy, program or budget decision, and that we consider how the community may benefit or be burdened by those.

### **Facilitating and promoting collaborative problem solving**

As part of that engagement work, the county is using the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) framework, which uses a set of public participatory practices to facilitate and promote collaborative problem solving that help correct structural inequities for historically disenfranchised communities. Communication and Engagement Services is leading a countywide training rollout of the framework for all staff, and it's a key component of the disparity reduction strategy.

### **Partnering with the Northside Achievement Zone**

Hennepin County partnered in the Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) from its start and continues to support their efforts to permanently close the achievement gap and end generational poverty in North Minneapolis. NAZ is focused on making multigenerational change in North Minneapolis. NAZ connects with scholars and families furthest behind and in greatest need, and they're achieving results. Their scholars have higher rates of proficiency than other comparable Northside scholars, and NAZ scholars in anchor schools are outperforming those in non-anchor schools.

### **Building community partnerships with Urban League Twin Cities and the MN Safe Streets collaborative**

Hennepin County is participating in the MN Safe Streets Pilot Program, which is a collaborative, community-based effort seeking to address the chronic violence in Minnesota urban and rural communities. Urban League Twin Cities operates as the parent organization, providing administrative support and working in partnership with faith communities, community organizations, public safety agencies and individual leaders – all with the purpose of developing a statewide infrastructure. The focus areas of MN Safe Streets include a critical incident response program designed to reduce violence through direct intervention and service and life alternative initiatives that uses partnerships with educational, job skills and mental health providers.

## Better Futures

Hennepin County is a partner and supporter of Better Futures Minnesota, a social enterprise that serves men who are often marginalized from society and typically cycle through costly public institutions as a result. By providing supports and using trauma-informed care, they help men returning from prison, predominantly African American, with a history of chronic poverty, unemployment, untreated mental illness, addiction, incarceration and homelessness.

The statistics are grim: African Americans represent only 5% of Minnesota's population, yet they make up 31% of the state's prison or jail population. Without systemic transformation and personal supports, nearly 60% will return to Minnesota prisons. Better Futures Minnesota provides work-training programs, including a reuse warehouse and building deconstruction, building maintenance, appliance recycling and janitorial services. Their approach seeks to reaffirm each man's dignity and instill self-discipline and behaviors that are a prerequisite to self-sufficiency.

## Engaging, listening and responding

Hennepin entered a partnership with Pillsbury United Communities, funded by the Kresge Foundation, to conduct broad community engagement to learn more about community needs within our disparity reduction domains, and to then take those needs and integrate them into our disparity reduction work. We know this human-centered approach to systems change will support us in dismantling racism in our systems.

Supporting local, state, regional and federal initiatives aligned with our vision and goals is ongoing. The Intergovernmental Relations team is working toward specific disparity reduction efforts as part of the County Board's legislative platform to expand resources and strengthen partnerships to reverse persistent racial and economic disparities that drive poverty, poor health, involvement in the criminal justice system, transportation access and low education achievement. Future legislative agendas will also center agenda items that have an impact on disparity reduction and racial equity.

...and will promote community efforts to amplify issues of racism to engage actively and authentically with communities of color wherever they live.

# Responding to COVID-19 pandemic

## Investing in community with CARES Act

Community need has never been clearer than during the COVID-19 pandemic. To that end, \$220 million has been allocated through CARES Act funding as of September 2020 and a number of efforts have been funded using a culturally-inclusive approach.

Some examples include:

- \$40 million for small business investments
- \$15 million invested in housing support for emergency rental assistance for those making 50% or below the area median income
- \$1.23 million to Community Development Block Grants to support stable housing
- \$4 million to provide relief to organizations providing human services and to support community-based organizations
- \$2.5 million to support career services
- \$2 million allocated for food security grants to community-based organizations who support cultural and faith-based communities
- \$200,000 spent for culturally specific outreach efforts within the Native American community, which is disproportionately affected by homelessness. This includes providing crisis outreach and housing navigation to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness and connecting people to housing and shelter more rapidly. Our partners are American Indian Community Development Corporation and the Minnesota Indian Women's Resource Center.
- \$1.687 million to support contact tracing, testing for communities without resources and trusted messengers to support communicating directly with those in need.
- \$1.6 million to provide more than 1 million face coverings to the community.
- \$1 million to distribute low-cost laptops to youth and seniors.



## Hennepin County Board directs County Administration to incorporate strategies to address this public health crisis into 2021 budget hearing materials...

The 2021 departmental budget template prompts conversation about how specific county spending is intended to reduce disparities in the seven domains, supportive disparity reduction data, and more information about partnerships involvement.

Our department directors will include disparity reduction impacts in their 2021 budget presentations. For example, the Department of Community Corrections and Rehabilitation is using data about all seven of the disparity reduction domains in their 2021 budget decision making process, particularly as the domain data relates to fees, which you'll see later this year during their budget presentation.

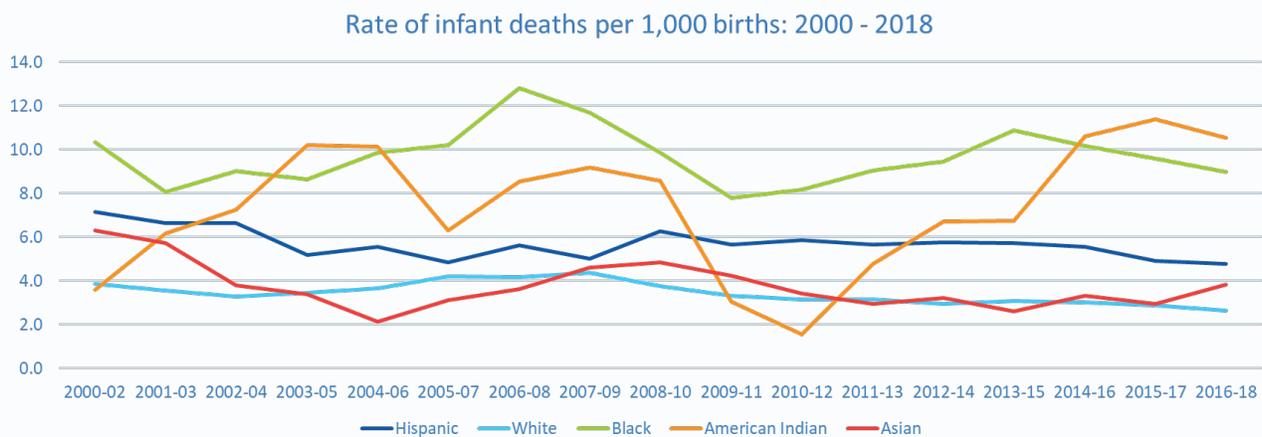
Hennepin County Board directs Administration to provide a written memo to the Board no later than three months after the passing of this Resolution, to communicate an implementation timeline for the following items:

1. Acknowledge that Hennepin County's current public health fact sheets present a clear picture of health disparity along lines of race/ethnicity.

Hennepin County's current public health fact sheets present a clear picture of health disparities based on race and ethnicity.

2. Recognize that this data-based health disparity along lines of race/ethnicity is significant and has direct impacts from birth to death to the individual, as well as to their family and community members.

Racial health disparities have significant and direct impacts from birth to death for our residents and community. A public health lens is incorporated in our disparity reduction work throughout our domains. Within each domain and across domains, we recognize that disparities exist along the lines of race and ethnicity. We also see the impact of disparities on our residents, throughout their lives and on their communities.



### Infant mortality

The infant mortality rate is the number of deaths for infants under one year of age in a given year for every 1,000 live births in the same year. It is one of the key measures of the health and well-being of a community, state or country. In 2017 72 infants in Hennepin County died before their first birthday, which is a 20% decrease in the number of infant deaths from 2016 (90 infant

deaths). This represents 4.4 infants per 1,000 born, which is below the Healthy People 2020 target of 6.0 deaths per 1,000 infants. In Hennepin County, racial and ethnic disparities mirror those seen nationally, with the highest rates of infant mortality among babies born to US-born African American mothers. Infant mortality rates are based on data provided by the Minnesota Department of Health. Prevention of infant

deaths should begin in the preconception period. Opportunities are available to improve the health of mothers and thus avoid preventable infant deaths.

One example of current activities to address disparities in birth outcomes and lower the infant mortality rates is home visits to pregnant and parenting families. This evidence-based model is delivered by a diverse group of community providers, so it is culturally specific. Home visitors are able to promote factors that lead to healthy birth outcomes, including educating the family about the importance of prenatal care, a healthy pregnancy, and providing parenting support; referrals and connections to health care; and other social services.

Additionally, Hennepin County provides over 100 pack n' plays per year to shelters and child and family community providers to assure safe sleeping environments for infants and families in need of this resource. Access to safe sleeping environments and use of safe sleep practices reduce infant deaths.

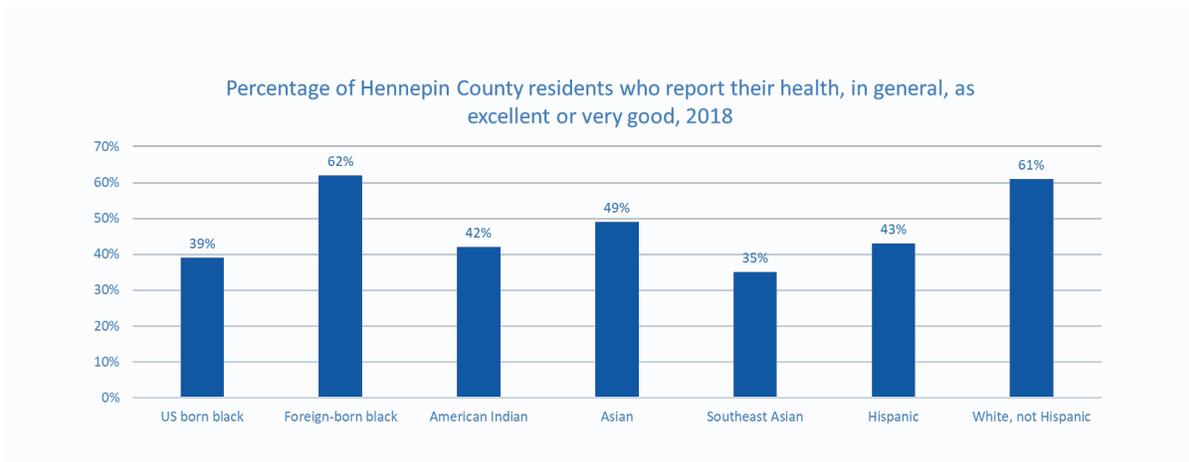
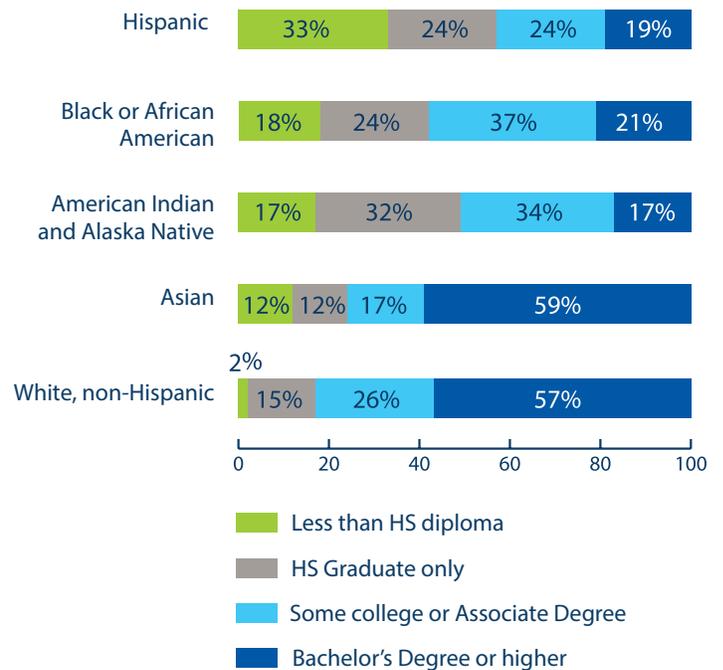
### Health

Health outcomes vary by race in addition to infant mortality rates. When we look at the SHAPE survey results, a county-sponsored survey that informs local public health, human services, and nonprofit agencies on how to improve community health, it shows that residents who report their health as excellent or very good varies based on race. This data is a driver in our work to eliminate racial health disparities.

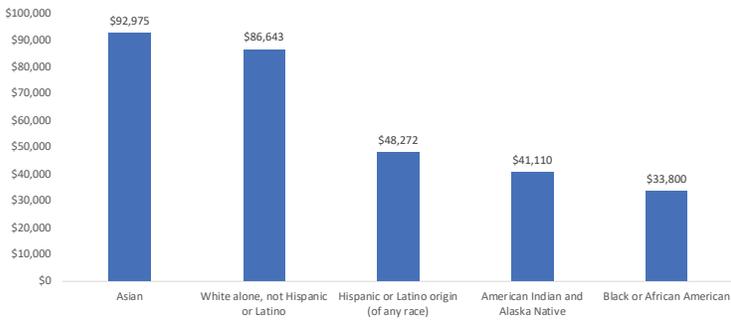
### Education attainment

We know that educational attainment varies by race in Hennepin County. According to data from the 2018 American Community Survey, one-year estimates of people of color don't fare as well as their White counterparts. This data is a driver for much of the work underway within our education domain.

#### High school graduate or higher



## Hennepin County median household income



### Income

Data shows disparities in a number of areas around employment and income. As you can see, disparities in household median income exist within Hennepin County. The median household income for a White household is three times higher than that of Black households.

Income disparities are a driver of efforts within our education and employment domains. Increasing educational attainment and living wage employment opportunities will have a direct impact on income disparities.

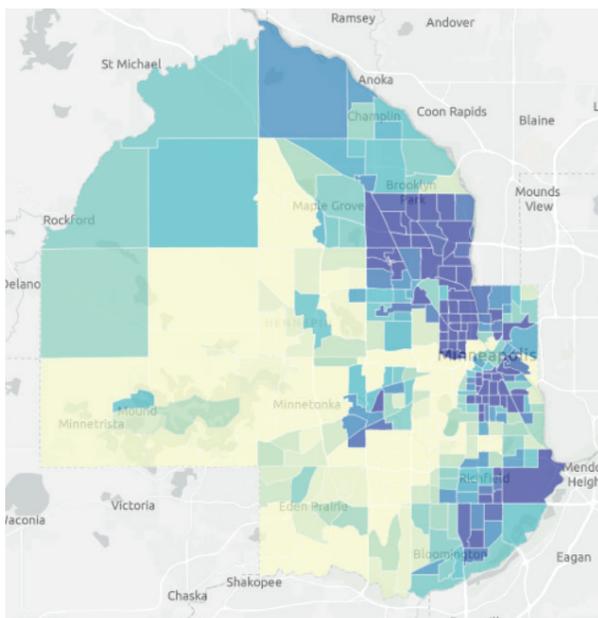
### Well-being

Well-being: The extent to which a person can live the life they have reason to value. A multi-dimensional concept relating to an overall sense of one's standard of living.

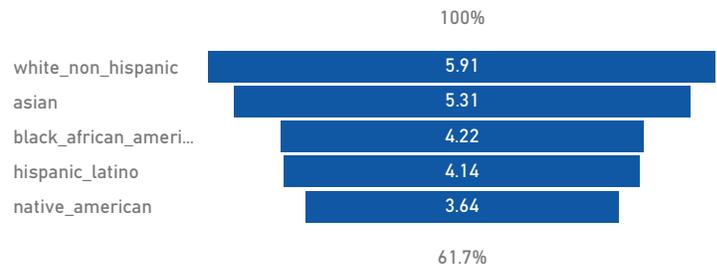
Once a person is achieving well-being, they are more empowered to make decisions for themselves. At this stage, the human services approach is the most tailored, person-centered and interactive. Generally speaking, once a person or a family has achieved well-being, they are less likely to cycle back into the system — they are able to move forward independently, to not only care for their own needs, but to nurture personal connections and contribute to overall community well-being.

The Human Development Index is a multidimensional, human-centered tool we use to measure the overall sense of one's standard of living, and the extent to which they can live the life they have reason to value, as well as the impact of our efforts.

The Human Development Index combines indicators from three domains — education, health, and income — into a composite index. We can see significant racial disparities in each area. Black, Indigenous and People of color (BIPOC) residents experience shorter life expectancy, less income and less education than their White counterparts. In areas with larger BIPOC populations, people experience less overall well-being.



### Well-Being (Human Development Index)



### 3. **Shift approach from incremental improvement centered on service-delivery to clients to a comprehensive approach that incorporates systemic, structural or institutional changes that may respond to the health disparity presented with a commensurate response.**

We have spent many years focused on disparity reduction at Hennepin County and recognize that disparities drive county business. We know that people in crisis or distress drive our business and the role of government historically has been to provide safety net services to people in crisis through shelter, health supports and income assistance. There are complex reasons that lead to residents needing our assistance, though the common drivers are disparities. The county board received commissioner district data at a disparity reduction board retreat in 2017 and again at the July 30, 2020 disparity reduction board briefing. The data outlined disparities by commissioner districts, and highlighted that disparities disproportionately affect Black, Indigenous and people of color, and are caused, in part, by systems. To transform and create equity for all, we must dismantle racism that causes these disparities.

Over the last seven years, you've seen the commitment of thousands of county employees who work to close disparities each and every day. Our disparity reduction strategy is centered on proactive change around the many challenges our residents face. Our work is intentional and comprehensive. We intentionally created organizational alignment, first by moving our 35 separate departments into five lines of business, and more recently six, to create a purposeful, focused organization. We recognize serving residents as our north star. We also have a common foundation of organizational core values of customer service, employee engagement, continuous improvement, diversity and inclusion and workforce development.

#### **Focus on disparities**

We then focused on disparities, which resulted in a disparity reduction board retreat in 2017 where we defined the disparity reduction domains, with a key focus of helping our residents move from poverty to self-sufficiency. We created a disparity reduction line of business, leadership roles to guide our domain teams, and are working toward common priorities, goals and strategies to reduce disparities.

#### **Race equity**

In 2019 our Diversity Equity and Inclusion Division led the charge to educate and inform all of our employees through our mandated Advancing Racial Equity training. Last year, the County board created the Race Equity Advisory Council, which will help us bring community voice to our disparity reduction work. Today, we're using the Racial Equity Impact Tool, which assists us in bringing an equity lens to our day-to-day work.

We have long journey ahead of us. The declaration of racism as a public health crisis draws attention to racism as a root cause of much of our work. We believe that disparity reduction is the solution to moving away from the challenges we have as an organization and a society.

#### **Public health lens**

A public health lens helps us look at how the broader systems within our community can be exclusionary and unjust. A public health approach helps us step back and look at the community the individual came from, the resources they had for education and job opportunities, their health needs, and the laws in place. Our disparity domains are the same as the social determinants of health; therefore, our efforts are aimed at improving the health and well-being of all people and communities.

We also recognize that incremental change leads to systems change. The core value of continuous improvement is operationalized through the behaviors of excel, improve and innovate and is a foundation for our staff in how they approach our work. Incremental change is sometimes the right approach for systems change, and the disparity reduction framework demands a more systemic and structural approach to change. This type of change is guided by the use of our Innovation Framework and Racial Equity Impact Tool as we create change within our domain teams and across departments. Through the use of data, root cause analysis that centers on social determinants of health, and intentional community engagement efforts, we will close the gap caused by racial disparities in our community.

## Community Health Improvement Partnership

Another great example of how we are using a comprehensive approach that incorporates systemic, structural or institutional changes is through the Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP). By engaging and working with organizations across our community, we can focus on targeting community health issues together using a collective impact model. CHIP operates under a joint commitment to health and racial equity agreed to by all organizations that states:

*Health and racial equity are at the core of our work. Because of this, we will focus on the ways structural and institutional racism, and also bias, impact outcomes for people of color. We will use a racial equity lens to focus our intent, which will bring us all to a shared understanding, language, and definitions on race and bias as we catalyze and carry out our work.*

CHIP is focused on two priority areas: community mental well-being and housing stability. During 2020, CHIP has intentionally lifted community solutions under these priorities using the following strategies:

1. Put communities in control of the work, thanks to a grant from the Public Health Accreditation Board and Robert Wood Johnson Foundation:

- Provided mini grants of \$300-\$500 to community members with the best local ideas and solutions to address racial disparities and improve mental well-being and housing stability in their neighborhood or community. Forty applications were received in the

first round, and eight were selected. All individuals and small teams are finishing up their projects now. Grantees are completing brief reports to share their learning and recommendations. Eight more projects were just selected in the second round of funding, and two more rounds will be funded in 2021. All projects are selected by a community review team.

- Funding four diverse community-based organizations at \$25,000 each for a total of \$100,000 to carry out a project of their choosing under one of CHIP's priorities. Selected organizations will carry out their proposed projects in collaboration with their communities. Seventeen applications were received from cultural, spiritual/faith and other organizations. Funding decisions are being made by a community review team with an anticipated start date of November 1, 2020. Projects selected will be those that propose to address a specific policy or practice change in government most likely have the greatest impact on racial disparities.
- Funding an intern with lived experience to work with the four funded CBOs and mini grant recipients, as well as with the CHIP planning team, executive committee and action teams.

2. Completed a year-long process to learn from organizations working to become trauma-informed. A survey of all CHIP organizations will be completed to determine their current status and path toward becoming trauma-formed. This will be used as a baseline for intentional work and annual follow up surveys.

## 4. Develop clear goals and objectives specific to achieving health-related outcomes in Hennepin's stated mission, vision and goals along lines of race/ethnicity.

In 2003 the County Board established a mission, vision and overarching goals. By putting the customer first, Hennepin County employees work every day to achieve our mission, vision and goals. We strive to improve our services through proactive, innovative public stewardship, and we are committed to reducing disparities and making a long-term impact by focusing on outcomes in education, employment, health, housing, income, justice and transportation.

We are also working toward three overarching goals in our disparity reduction work.

### We are:

- Increasing capacity for advancing racial equity by normalizing and operationalizing conversations about race
- Implementing and operationalizing inclusive and equitable policies and practices
- Generating community-driven results

**5. Develop a consistent methodology for data collection, reporting, and analysis related to race/ethnicity for future public health data fact sheets in order to continue transparency with the publishing of reports and to inform recommendations to decision-makers.**

Hennepin County has a long history of proactively collecting data. We have a number of data reports that guide our disparity reduction work. We're using Power BI, a data visualization tool, and GIS to help us visualize our data. We're continuing to add data and are working toward a shared venue to highlight domain-specific priority measurements that include our overall theory of change.

We are also working across all of our business lines to first work toward including race data for all of our services, and then to use census race categories from the 2018 American Community Survey so that we're better able to compare data across our many services and geographies.

There are 34 publicly available public health fact sheets, in addition to other data publications on a wide variety of topics. Fact sheets and reports are updated as new data becomes available. This is done on an annual basis for data such as birth, death, immunization, HIV and STDs and social determinant data; every three years for one of the major sources of

youth and adolescent data—the Minnesota Student Survey, and every four years from the Hennepin County SHAPE survey. Data sources for annual data include vital records and reportable disease data from the Minnesota Department of Health, immunization data from our immunization registry, Immulink, and social determinant data from the American Community Survey population estimates. Health areas covered in the fact sheets and reports include:

- Racism and health
- Chronic conditions and mortality
- Infectious disease
- Nutrition, physical activity and substance use
- Preventative health care and access to services
- Maternal, infant and child health
- Mental health
- Social connectedness and environment

**6. Conduct an assessment of internal policy, procedures, and goals for the purpose of forming recommendations that may demonstrably improve health outcomes related to race/ethnicity, with engagement opportunities from Hennepin's workforce groups and the newly established Race Equity Advisory Council (REAC).**

As our disparity reduction domain teams work toward achieving the 21 disparity reduction priorities, they — as well as departments and staff — use the Racial Equity Impact Tool for everything from program planning and budgeting to workforce planning and program evaluation. The tool:

- Proactively seeks to eliminate racial inequities and advance equity
- Identifies clear goals, objectives and measurable outcomes
- Engages community in decision-making processes

- Identifies who will benefit or be burdened by a decision, and develops strategies to advance racial equity and mitigate unintended negative consequences
- Develops mechanisms for successful implementation and evaluation of impact.

Recently we added tool champions across the organization to help build capacity to use the tool in all of our work. In addition to the domain work, our departments set disparity reduction goals and staff participation in workforce groups focused on equity and engagement. See below for examples of these efforts.

## **Collaborative communities**

We have 13 Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) as well as department-specific groups focusing on diversity and inclusion. ERGs can supply valuable perspectives and unique insights into business problem-solving, strategic planning, service and benefits design, and deeper organizational connection to the communities being served. ERG goals and activities aim to leverage existing employee diversity, promote inclusion and/or gain improved outcomes in three areas:

### ***Develop the organization***

- Build networks across departments
- Provide community outreach and collaboration
- Assist in difficult conversations
- Sponsor cultural events
- Help strengthen transitions for new employees

### ***Strengthen business operations***

- Share knowledge and perspective
- Engage and consult in planning at all levels of the organization
- Assist in defining and implementing initiatives
- Recommend improvements in customer service development and delivery
- Consult on policy development and refinement

### ***Develop talent***

- Serve as interview panelists
- Mentor and coach colleagues
- Develop peer support networks
- Provide leadership experience
- Help identify talent-rich recruitment pool

In addition to ERGs, the county has multiple collaborative communities, including the Innovation & Improvement Community of Practice, Project Management Community of Practice, Diversity and Inclusion Community of Practice, among others. Later this year we will be kicking off the Disparity Reduction Community of Practice, which will be supported by the Disparity Reduction line of business and made up of a steering committee representing all lines of business. The Community will be a space for staff to practice the Racial Equity Impact Tool, Innovation Framework, and share other ideas and approaches for our disparity reduction work.

## **Public Health strategic plan and on-going work**

Hennepin County Public Health is currently developing its 2021-2026 Strategic Plan. Addressing health and racial equity is the plan's overarching strategic priority. The initial draft of the department's mission and vision are as follows:

- Vision: People who live, work and play in Hennepin County will experience optimal health supported by social justice and racial equity.
- Mission: We will collaborate to promote community well-being, health equity, and positive impact through science, policy change, creating supportive environments, prevention efforts and culturally-responsive programs and services.

Our Public Health team is also leading employee and community engagement activities that are intended to build ownership and unity of purpose within the organization and build upon our relationships and partnerships within the community to identify opportunities where our collective efforts may have the greatest impact upon health and racial equity. These engagement activities are expected to be completed in October with the learnings integrated into the department's strategic and operational plans.

Public Health's Health Equity Leadership Team works to advance health and racial equity in all the department's work with a focus on the social determinants of health. They created a five-year health equity plan that integrates social determinants of health (the county's disparity domains) into decision making.

For the past three years, Public Health has administered a health equity assessment to all staff, using the data to measure progress and identify growth opportunities. They've supported health and racial equity pilot projects for World Aids Day, breastfeeding, dental agreements and planning for potential emergencies such as mass vaccinations, all with the goal of ensuring that the most vulnerable members of our community have access.

In July of 2020 the Public Health executive team commissioned an internal task force to create a plan to address the racial trauma in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd. Staff from throughout the

department with a diverse set of cultural perspectives volunteered to take part, meeting weekly to create two plans to address racial justice through changes to policy, procedure and practice. The first plan is a set of short-term goals intended to address the highest priorities with meaningful action by the end of the 2020 calendar year. The longer-range plan will be more comprehensive and is being designed in collaboration with the Health Equity Leadership Team, strategic planning and other staff-led teams within Public Health. This comprehensive plan will be implemented in 2021 with a focus on racial equity priorities.

## **7. Conduct an assessment on how a public health lens or approach may connect to or improve other work within Hennepin County, such as housing, income, education, public safety, emergency response, criminal justice, sexual violence and more.**

The initial disparity reduction project, which began in 2015, included data analysis and research, an environmental scan of current work across the county, identification of gaps, and employee listening sessions and engagement. This work set the stage for development of our current disparity reduction domains and priorities.

Our seven disparity reduction domains of education, employment, health, housing, income, justice and transportation are social determinants of health in and of themselves. By this design, we're centering our disparity reduction work in social determinants of health as our starting point. The use of the Racial Equity Impact Tool furthers the alignment to a public health lens in that we start with data, both quantitative and qualitative, to understand the needs and root causes of the disparities, and work toward systems change through engagement with those who have lived experiences within our system. Understanding population needs through data is a key component of this work, as highlighted in our data resources. Work is underway within our disparity reduction priorities and is continuing to grow beyond the domain teams and into departments that have adopted the use of the Racial Equity Impact Tool.

### **Responding to the opioid epidemic**

The Opioid Initiative is integrated work that applies a public health lens to all county opioid work including the public safety and criminal justice systems. We received a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for the purpose of building an integrated data warehouse. We are working to build this cross-sector data integration. The first two sets of data to be loaded into the data warehouse are emergency department claims and jail data, and we aim to have these two data sets entered by the end of the year. The purpose of this grant is to evaluate opioid-related interventions and programs across the health and criminal justice sectors.

The Opioid Initiative is actively embedded and responding with the Native American population, specifically those who live in Little Earth and encampments, through Public Health community health workers and Health Care for the Homeless clinical staff. We work with Hennepin County's Somali community engagement team, along with Street Works, Brian Coyle Center, and Somali Moms, to culturally respond to the opioid crisis in the Somali population. We are also members of the Metro Urban Indian Directors and South Minneapolis Public Safety Coalition standing memberships to form health related outcomes through engagement.

## Race Equity Advisory Council

The annual report from the Race Equity Advisory Council will be a key driver of our disparity reduction goals, strategies and priorities. We also look forward to being able to bring specific questions and policy review requests to the Council to help us better center community voice in our work.

## Health & Human Services Policy Approval Group

The Health & Human Services Policy Approval Group adopted a checklist for new and reviewed policies

that includes as a required step completion of the Racial Equity Impact Tool. Based on early experiences with reviewing existing policies, an expedited policy review process was created where policy owners doing routine reviews of policies can answer preliminary questions about whether a policy has a potential racial equity impact. If there is the potential for an impact, policy owners are directed to the full tool. When the full tool is completed, it is presented with the policy draft and then stored along with the final policy as a record of decisions related to racial equity.

### 8. Develop a recommendation, based on a public health intervention model, for standards and implementation of any future Hennepin County anti-racist community initiatives and proposals.

Because our disparity reduction work is centered on our seven disparity reduction domains, which are social determinants of health, and we've adopted the use of the Racial Equity Impact Tool, we believe we've set the standards for implementation of current and future anti-racist community initiatives and proposals.

### 9. Conduct an assessment related to all human resources, vendor selection and grant management activities with a racial equity lens, including reviewing internal processes and practices, such as hiring, promotions, leadership appointments and funding.

#### Human Resources

Our Human Resources (HR) Department recently created a proactive action plan to address racial equity and eliminate systemic racism by reforming HR rules, policies and practices. HR has developed a project plan and identified Black, Indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) staff to lead the project. Internal and external BIPOC employees and stakeholders will also be identified, including members of our ERGs. HR will be contracting with an external consultant of color, Esparza Consulting LLC, that specializes in racial equity to partner with us on every phase of this work. The first phase of this work is underway and by the end of 2020 we will identify and implement quick and

impactful wins. Phase two will continue into 2021 and will be more comprehensive as we take a deeper dive and focus on long-term systemic change toward the project mission: Advance/reach racial equity and eliminate systemic racism by reforming HR rules, policies and procedures.

Since 2015 we've increased employees of color and in 2019 our overall staff composition mirrors the racial makeup of the county. While we don't have a 30% representation of people of color at leadership levels, we have continued success and it is growing every year. We've made organizational progress, particularly by putting initiatives and tools in place to reduce bias and break down hiring barriers.



## Purchasing and Contract Services

Our Purchasing and Contract Services area is working toward a number of disparity reduction goals. Some of those are reflected in the engagement and outreach efforts they've made where they seek to leverage county procurement opportunities to reduce disparities in our community, promote economic development and advance equity in contracting. They've hosted and participated in community outreach events as a county ambassador, and assigned staff liaisons to targeted community groups who have a focus on representing Black, Indigenous and people of color.

Working with county departments to engage local entrepreneurs with right-sized, sheltered market opportunities that create a level playing field, the improvements in contracting results are tangible for Small Business Enterprises (SBE), Small Minority Business Enterprises (SMBE) and Small Women Business Enterprises (SWBE).

In 2019, contract totals with minority firms increased:

- Construction - \$16.9 million, an increase of \$7.8 million from 2018
- Goods and Services - \$11.6 million, an increase of over \$600,000 from 2018
- Professional Services - \$11.7 million, an increase of over \$1.4 million from 2018

In late 2019, at the request of Hennepin County, the Central Certification Program (CERT) established a new classification for micro-businesses among the certified SBE firms. These truly small businesses are designated as "Emerging Small Business Enterprise" (ESBE) firms. Depending on the industry type, on average, 70% - 90% of the ESBE firms are minority and women owned firms.

Hennepin County is currently modifying its consulting services procurement program to prioritize the consideration of available ESBE firms for project work. Additional sheltered markets limited to ESBE firms will be created for upcoming procurements.

## Prevailing wage

Hennepin County is a national leader in the expansion of the use of prevailing wage: in 1997 Hennepin County Board adopted resolution, 97-7-442 expanding its prevailing wage policy to cover building maintenance. Including prevailing wage requirements ensures there is no competition to the bottom for wages paid on publicly funded contracts.

## Health and Human Services contracting

In Health and Human Services, a Contracting Equity workgroup is working toward actively dismantling racial inequities by contracting with a mix of providers that reflect the needs and composition of communities and improve community outcomes. They have four strategies they've outlined and are beginning to move forward:

- Provide funding for technical assistance and innovative service delivery improvements for small providers.
- Recruit people with lived experience and staff with community relationships to participate in Request for Proposal (RFP) evaluation panels and provide bias training for individuals who are part of RFP evaluation panels.
- Set aside designated dollar amounts for RFPs for smaller providers to allow small providers to compete against other small providers.
- Include outcomes that measure progress towards racial equity goals and feedback from people receiving services in contract performance measures.

## Audit, Compliance and Investigative Services

Hennepin County has a long and proud tradition of supporting smaller vendors. Vendor Compliance, a unit within Internal Audit, supports other departments in their efforts to contract with smaller vendors who might not have resources such as accountants on staff to support their business. The team consults with vendors to better understand their situation, supports training, and connects vendors with outside resources that they can access. The team is always looking for innovative ways to promote new and small businesses in partnering with the county.

Recently, the team supported Health and Human Services to look at programs holistically to find ways to make contracting easier for vendors. For example, they worked with vendors within the HIV/AIDS area and, after looking at the program requirements, they found that some vendors could use an easier process to verify client eligibility.

The unit also supports disparity reduction efforts with a new audit objective to ensure use of the Racial Equity Impact Tool when they conduct operational and program audits.

**10. Recommend reporting mechanism and cadence options to the Board of Commissioners, jointly or in mutual partnership with REAC (several existing models to consider within other CAB bodies).**

The Race Equity Advisory Council convened for the first time on August 20, 2020. The new council was welcomed by Commissioner Angela Conley, County Administrator David Hough and Assistant County Administrator Chester Cooper. The council is set to make decisions about how they will report unmet needs in the community annually to the County Board this fall. This report will be incorporated into strategy decisions made by the Disparity Reduction Governance Board.

Moving into 2021, new reports are being developed to showcase the progress of each disparity reduction domain using the Racial Equity Impact Tool and their short-, intermediate- and long-term impacts. These reports are dynamic and will grow to capture more data over time. On an annual basis we will issue an end-of-the-year report to update priority status and to outline priorities for the next year.

# Letter from Administration

As you know, Hennepin County's disparity reduction strategy is centered on proactive change around the many challenges our residents face. Our work is intentional, comprehensive and iterative: We're constantly learning and improving. The declaration of racism as a public health crisis helps us to continue this work by naming and acknowledging that racism is a root cause of inequities.

In our journey to eliminate disparities and build equity, we have taken numerous steps. We changed our county structure, creating a Disparity Reduction line of business, a community engagement team and a data team. Perhaps most important in the last four years, we've sought to raise awareness and help our staff understand why disparity reduction is critical.

Since all staff are critical to success, we invested in them, building awareness and developing capacity to have meaningful conversations about race, disparities, inclusion and equity. We asked them to consider their day-to-day work as well as the larger community impacts. To do that, all staff participated in Advancing Racial Equity, which taught the history of race, explained implicit and explicit bias, and explored how individuals and institutions create structural racism and how this affects people's lives.

Leaders are also critical to success. We invested in a three-tier leadership training to support our leaders in our ongoing efforts to support a diverse, equitable and inclusive work environment. These trainings include Little Things Mean A Lot, Conducting Non-Biased Interviews and the Intercultural Conflict Style. We launched an Innovation and Improvement Cohort where staff learn problem-solving processes to support disparity reduction domain-specific projects.

In response to the murder of George Floyd, we held staff listening sessions where staff could share openly and be vulnerable with each other. Staff came together after this tragic event, showing a willingness to understand each other and to help make changes.

Session facilitators said they began hearing, for the first time, broader understanding from White staff about how their Black and Brown colleagues live in anxiety and fear every day. This is culture change.

We ask that all employees work with empathy by focusing on our residents and stakeholders to understand their needs. We know that program, policy, procedure and partnership decisions should be made with the direct participation of members of the groups affected, so we support the motto, "Nothing about us without us!" We also created an Engagement Services division, which is reaching out to communities and building relationships for the work, including developing culturally-specific responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We know that data is critical to measuring the impact of the work, so our data team has created data dashboards that clearly and dramatically illustrate disparities in Hennepin County. As we change systems and policies, we should see a change in outcomes. If we don't, then we know we must try a different approach.

There is no official roadmap for ending disparities and building equity. Often policies have unintended consequences, which is why it's imperative that we explore how these decisions impact people before we make them by use of the Racial Equity Impact Tool. We are also creating a culture where staff feel supported to think outside the box, test ideas, collaborate, learn together and build solutions.

We know that we will have failures and successes, and we will share them as we learn and grow.

Sincerely,

David Hough and Chester Cooper

County Administrator and Assistant County Administrator for Disparity Reduction