

Addressing Racism as a Public Health Crisis

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Public Health Advisory Board (PHAB)

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Whatcom County
HEALTH
Department



Definitions



Racism: The marginalization and/or oppression of people of color based on a socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people.

Systemic racism: A combination of systems, institutions and factors that advantage white people and for people of color, cause widespread harm and disadvantages in access and opportunity.

Public Health: The science of protecting and improving health of people and their communities.

Crisis: A situation that has reached a critical phase.



Image: Community Conversation on Resilience and Equity, Whatcom Family and Community Network, March 2016

Across the state and nation, communities are coming together to address the urgent and ongoing impacts of racism on the public's health...

In Whatcom County...



The County Health Board has laid the foundation for taking action to address the sources and impacts of racism locally

- 2013 • Call for Compassionate Community Approach to Public Health Services
- 2015 • Committing Whatcom County to Adopt a "Healthy Planning" Approach
- 2018 • Health Protection for Immigrant Families
- 2019 • Affirming Commitment to Whatcom County's Young Children and Their Families
- 2019 • Reducing Incarceration of Young Adults
- 2020 • Child and Family Action Plan

2013-038- Compassionate Community Approach



- “Compelling research... points out the **negative impacts of adverse childhood experiences (“ACEs”)** and **early trauma** on population health”
- “The impact that **early trauma** has on children, families and the general population is on par with, or greater than, biological or infectious disease”
- “The Health Board will seek opportunities to **increase awareness** and promote the concept of a **“compassionate”** or **“trauma sensitive”** approach”

2015-038- Healthy Planning



- “Health is influenced by the **interaction of many factors**, and not simply genetics, individual behavior or access to medical care”
- “Health is also determined by **social and economic factors** and opportunities”
- “Data show that people...**who experience racial or ethnic discrimination** or other social stresses are more likely to report poor health status and have lower life expectancy”

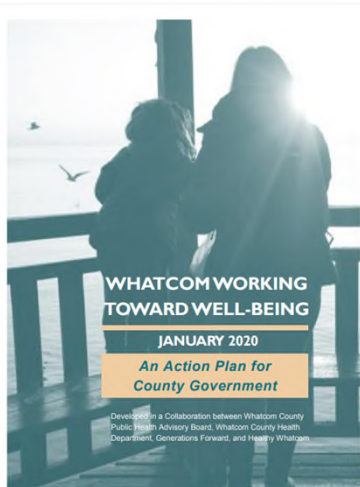
2019-020-Young Children & Their Families



Photo from Generations Forward Future Search Conference: *Envisioning a Future where All Whatcom County Children Thrive*, Oct 2017

- “Indigenous children *and* children of color...are more likely to experience adversity due to **historical and persistent patterns** of discrimination, oppression and lack of equitable opportunities”
- “Disproportionate levels of **adversity** contribute to **health and social disparities and inequities**”

2020 Child & Family Action Plan



Recommended Action

“Commit resources to facilitate the adoption of equity and trauma-informed policies and practices across county government”

- *Support countywide training...*
- *Conduct policy reviews...and explore changes to existing policies to support equity broadly and race equity specifically*
- *Become a member of Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE)*

<http://whatcomcounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/49297/Child-and-Family-Action-Plan---January-2020> (Page 19)



Why address race and racism as a public health issue?

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Racism impacts individual health & leads to health disparities



Exposure

Ethnicity-based maltreatment & racism

Stress Response

Acute & enduring changes in cognition, affect, behavior, and physiology

Health Impacts

Stress-associated behaviors & health conditions

Racism impacts the Social Determinants of Health



Healthy People 2030

Racial disparities in all FIVE areas of SDOH



Racism impacts children and families

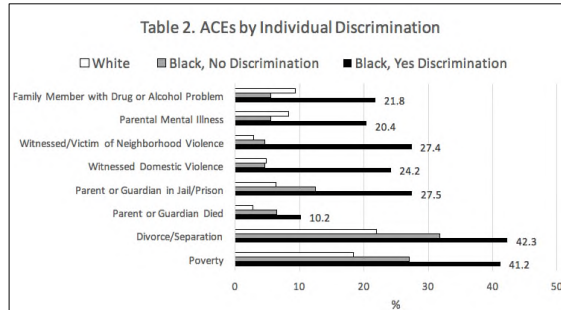


- Black women 3 X as likely to die in childbirth
- Black newborns more than 2X as likely to die as White babies

Racism associated with childhood adversity

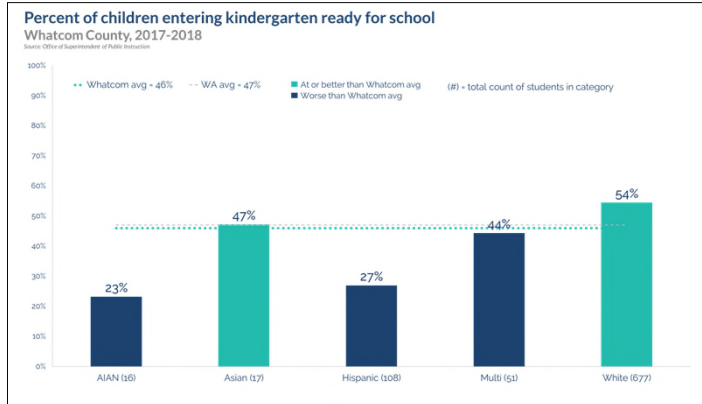


Children in families experiencing racial discrimination are more likely to have other Adverse Childhood Experiences” (ACEs)



<https://jordaninstituteforfamilies.org/2020/racism-is-an-adverse-childhood-experience-ace/>

Racism impacts child development



Data Notes
Data includes Bellingham School District SD, Blaine SD, Ferndale SD, Lummi Tribal Agency, Lynden SD, Meridian SD, Mount Baker SD, and Nooksack Valley SD.

Racism impacts mental health



Percent of 10th graders reporting feeling depression Whatcom County, 2018

Source: Healthy Youth Survey, Washington State Department of Health



Data Notes

Healthy Youth Survey Question: During the past 12 months, did you ever feel so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row that you stopped doing some usual activities?

Racism impacts education



On-time graduation rates

Whatcom County, 2017-2018

Percent of Whatcom County high school seniors who graduate high school within four years

Source: Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington



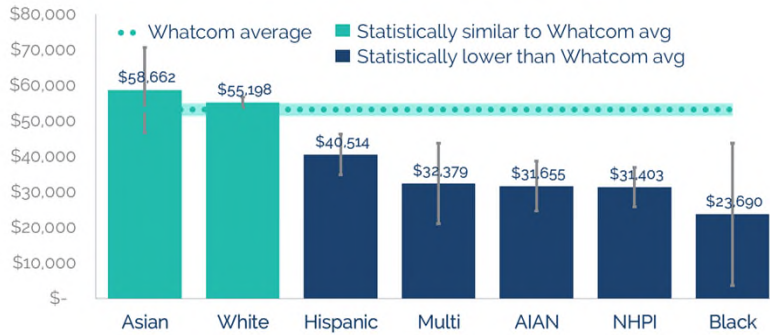
Racism impacts economic stability



Median Household Income

2010-2015, 5-year estimates

Source: American Community Survey, US Census Bureau



Racism associated with COVID-19



Percentage of Confirmed Cases by Race & Ethnicity

Data updated through 09/28/2020

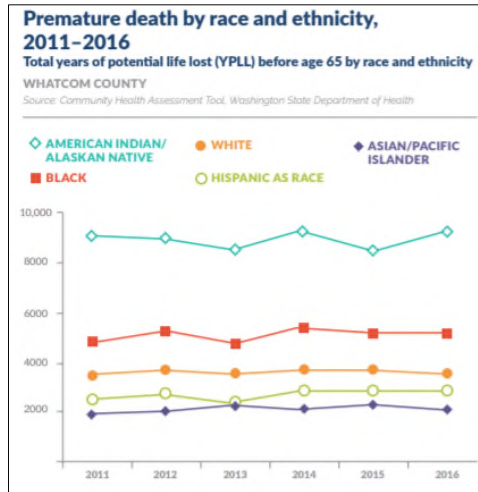
Race/Ethnicity Known	% of Cases	% of Total Whatcom Population
White NH	56.6 %	78.7 %
Hispanic as Race	30.3 %	9.5 %
AIAN NH	5.0 %	2.5 %
Asian NH	2.4 %	4.3 %
Multiracial NH	2.3 %	3.6 %
Other Race NH	2.1 %	0.0 %
Black NH	0.9 %	1.0 %
NHOPI NH	Suppressed	0.3 %

Approximately 17% of cases have unknown race/ethnicity.

If counts are between 1-9, data are suppressed to comply with Washington State Department of Health small numbers guidelines.

NH: Non-Hispanic AIAN: American Indian or Alaska Native NHOPI: Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander Other: Respondent selected "Other Race"

Racism associated with premature death



Racism is a public health crisis



Time to act is now.
 Therefore, be it resolved...

- This Health Board...**
- Declares that racism is a public health crisis
 - Commits to making Whatcom County a welcoming, safe community for everyone
 - Endorses policies and practices for employee conduct and equitable treatment of all people
 - Commits to actively participate in dismantling of systemic racism and impacts
 - Will evaluate and support policies consistent with principles of equity
 - Will facilitate keeping data and monitoring progress



Health Board supports these actions...

- Implement annual training for elected officials and staff
- Assess and revise department policies and procedures
- Ensure hiring practices provide greater opportunities for people of color to be employed
- Ensure diversity of race within County commissions
- Support community efforts to amplify issues of racism and engage with communities of color
- Build alliances with other organizations including other local governments through entities such as Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE)



**Thank you for your
commitment to the health
and well-being of all people in
Whatcom County**