



# Oregon Public Health Association

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## Racism is an ongoing public health crisis that needs our attention now Taking a Stand for Racial Justice

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Statement from OPHA Board of Directors for Immediate Release

As former President Barack Obama shared in a recent statement, “The 'knee on the neck' is a metaphor for how the system so cavalierly holds black folks down, ignoring the cries for help.”

As the Oregon Public Health Association, we, too, raise our voices, horrified. We cannot be silent.

We are heart-broken, angry, and, sadly, not surprised by the death of father, brother, uncle, friend, community member George Floyd while in police custody. Mr. Floyd’s death is a most recent symptom of deep, persistent, and deadly impacts of racism on Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC). The pain, injustice, and horror of this news is tied to our work because we are committed to removing inequities and biases within our system to create a safe and healthy community for everyone.

Systemic, institutional, and interpersonal racism is a public health crisis in our country and in our state that must be addressed. “When public policy, institutional practices, and other social and economic structures combine to perpetuate inequity between people of different ethnic groups, it is known as structural racism,” former American Public Health Association President, Camara Jones MD, MPH, PhD.

Racism is the reason that George Floyd was murdered. Racism is the reason why COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted people of color. Racism is the reason why even when researchers control for educational attainment and income inequality, people of color still experience higher rates of health inequities and average years of life lost. In Oregon, African Americans and American Indians and Alaska Natives experienced more years of potential life lost (YPLL) than any other race and ethnicity in the state (Oregon Death Certificate Data, 2016). Furthermore, communities of color are also more likely to be uninsured (Oregon Health Insurance Survey, 2016). Similarly, when black people and people of color are not truly free to live their lives because they are in constant fear of violence from the public and police, health cannot be achieved.

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Action must be taken now.

Racism is insidious and exists across all sectors and impacts all social determinants of health. We call for immediate action as well as investment and reallocation of resources in long-term and intentional efforts to examine and address the systemic and interpersonal conditions which allow inequities and racism to persist. We all have responsibility and a role to play in addressing this national and public health crisis. This work starts with each of us and especially those with the benefit and safety of privilege to speak out.

As public health professionals we are aware that we need to acknowledge the recent actions of individuals working for law enforcement in Minneapolis because they have immediate consequences to the trust we are always building with residents in our community. By making this consequence explicit internally, we can decide how to take action accordingly.

For example:

- For those of us doing community outreach, we can plan to slow down and ask in a meeting how a community is feeling and how our partners are doing.
- For those of us working on policies that intersect with re-opening and law enforcement, we can make public our commitment to establishing policies that don't create more harm.

We refuse to be silent, and we call for you to join us in our advocacy for a healthier nation and state. We must amplify and support anti-racism work that addresses systemic and interpersonal racism. At the Oregon Public Health Association, we will never stop advocating for the conditions that promote safe and more healthful lives for all, so everyone has a chance to not only breathe, but to thrive and be well.

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Oregon Public Health Association champions the health of all people and all communities. We strengthen the public health profession. We advocate for, and help write the policies that make our streets, buildings, parks, schools and neighborhoods safe and healthy for everyone regardless of their race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or income status. We speak out for public health issues and policies backed by science and work to amplify community voices in addressing health inequities. Established in 1944, we are a broad-based member community advocating at the state level to improve the public's health. Visit us at [oregonpublichealth.org](http://oregonpublichealth.org). OPHA is the Oregon State Affiliate of the American Public Health Association.