

# IT IS UNDENIABLE: RACISM IS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS.

As members and leaders from many of Chicago's healthcare organizations addressing the disproportionate black and brown mortality from the COVID-19 pandemic, we say without hesitation that **Black Lives Matter**.

No person of decency can look at the images of George Floyd's killing without feelings of rage, horror, shame and grief. The deaths of Mr. Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor — and too many others — are unjust and unconscionable.

We must double down on our efforts. Systemic racism is a real threat to the health of our patients, families and communities. We stand with all of those who have raised their voices to capture the attention of Chicago and the nation with a clear call for action.

The health centers and hospitals we represent are deeply woven into the fabric of the communities we serve, live and work in, and we stand united as frontline staff against racism, injustice and inaction.

Racism results in generational trauma and poverty, while also unquestionably causing higher rates of illness and death in black and brown communities. We have seen — in its rawest form — how the trauma of systemic racism adds to the historical injustices that have disproportionately affected communities of color. Community health centers and Chicagoland hospitals work to provide high quality, compassionate care in the face of health disparities and poor outcomes resulting from social and economic inequities.

These social determinants of health include poverty, inadequate housing, underperforming schools, police brutality, mass incarceration, food deserts, joblessness, poor access to health care and violence. All of these factors contribute to health inequities in our communities. And they serve as a recipe for pain, suffering, premature mortality — and understandable civil unrest.

In our communities, there is also resilience, innovation, a tradition of faith and a spirit of unity that manages to thrive even under the weight of this systemic burden. Imagine the potential for our communities with dramatically improved social and economic conditions and health outcomes.

It's time to fully realize this potential. It's time for action. We will work more intentionally with community-based partners in building and sustaining the sweeping change that is needed to ensure health equity across the city and particularly in our most vulnerable neighborhoods.

As healthcare organizations, we are committed to being part of the solution, both within our organizations and in partnership with local community groups. We are focused on improving access to care and eliminating racial biases that contribute to poor health outcomes.

We have come together as healthcare providers from all across the city and partnered with community-based organizations to respond to COVID-19 as part of Chicago's Racial Equity Rapid Response Team. Here are some of the steps we already are taking to help overcome the healthcare disparities in our communities:

- » **COVID-19:** We are providing testing, direct care and contact tracing while also partnering with the City of Chicago to provide services and personal protective equipment to marginalized communities, educational programs and advocacy for personal practices that flatten the curve.
- » **Hiring Programs:** We have implemented hiring programs that build pipelines for people of color to find careers in healthcare.
- » **Community Investment:** We are keeping dollars in our community to create jobs and help rebuild strained and decimated economies.
- » **Pharmacy and Grocery:** As thousands of residents are left without essential pharmacies, which have closed following vandalism and looting, healthcare providers are partnering to bring them back as rapidly as possible. We call on pharmacies and grocery stores to commit to reopening their shuttered stores on the South and West Sides of Chicago to ensure access to vital medications and food.
- » **Restoration and Rebuilding:** Members of our organizations are literally working side-by-side with other volunteers to rebuild following demonstrations across Chicago.
- » **Listening:** Many in our organizations will never know the struggle systemic racism has created for our colleagues at work and for members of our community. We vow to listen to our patients and colleagues of color and to learn from their experiences. We commit to be allies, advocates and partners in being the change we want to see in the world.

We also are committed to continue working to help Chicago and Illinois overcome systemic racism and the health care disparities it creates.

#### We commit to:

- » Re-examine our institutional policies with an equity lens and make any policy changes that promote equity and opportunity.
- » Improve access to primary and specialty care.
- » Continue to focus on helping our communities overcome chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease and asthma.
- » Continue to advocate for investments that create innovative solutions to achieve enduring improvements in access, quality and health outcomes for our communities.
- » Continue our commitment to hiring locally and promoting leaders of color.
- » Renew and expand each organization's commitment to providing anti-racism and implicit bias training for physicians, nurses and staff.
- » Advocate for increased funding for social needs, social services and programs that promote social justice.

Our society only truly thrives when everyone has an opportunity to succeed and live a healthy life. We are committed to moving forward together. By harnessing the collective strengths of our organizations, we will help serve our communities as agents of change.

Sincerely,

