

Statement from Nancy Heaton, CEO, Foundation for Community Health

“We at the Foundation for Community Health join with those in mourning the inhumane death of George Floyd — the latest in a series of horrifying and unjust killings of black Americans at the hands of police — and in demanding that it is time for local and national government, to acknowledge that Black Lives Matter and begin the hard work of change. Change that reorients power so that is shared with marginalized communities, and builds new systems that honor our shared humanity and acknowledges the value of all experiences and perspectives.”

Racism is a Public Health Issue

George Floyd’s last words will be forever seared into my memory of this particular time in history. For me, they are not only a heartbreaking reminder of Floyd’s death and the many other black American’s who have died as result of longstanding structural and systematic racism within our justice system, but they are also a reminder of how the COVID-19 pandemic — a disease that also makes it difficult to breathe — has highlighted the racial disparities that persist in America.

The convergence of these [public health crises](#) has strained and tested all aspects of our daily lives. Together they have revealed the weaknesses of our public health infrastructure, our disjointed health delivery system, and more importantly, how the endemic inequalities in our society affect us all. Racism has had a direct impact on all aspects of what we in public health refer to as the [social determinants of health](#): man-made conditions such as housing, economic opportunity, resources needed to eat, live, work, play, as well as access to quality physical, mental and oral health care.

What we know from health data is stark and irrefutable. The [Connecticut Health Foundation](#) reports that Black and Hispanic residents experience different levels to health access while also dealing with “...the effects of more direct forms of racism – unequal treatment within medicine and the psychological and physiological effects of living with the stress of discrimination.” The [New York State Health Foundation](#) concurs.

Here at the Foundation for Community Health we have always focused our mission, “...to improve the health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable residents”. However, in recent years we have begun to take a harder look at how to apply an equity lens in service to this mission. While our service area is primarily rural and less diverse than most communities, we know that by working more closely with those who have not had equal opportunities to thrive, we can become more effective in addressing the health of our community. We’re committed to being part of the change that we are demanding of our local and national government and in the coming months will be examining more closely how we can reorient our power and role in the community so that it contributes to a more equitable and just society.

What can you do? Here are a few [Anti-racism resources](#) compiled by Sarah Sophie Flicker and Alyssa Klein to get you started. We also suggest reading Connecticut Health Foundation’s publication: [Health Disparities in Connecticut: Causes, Effects and What We Can Do](#) to learn more about the challenges in achieving health equity in Connecticut.