

TOWN OF LEXINGTON, MA
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
PREAMBLE TO RESOLUTION DECLARING
RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS

Declaring racism to be a public health crisis offers a clear path to intentionally acknowledging and addressing disparities and inequities. Adopting a formal Resolution can catalyze and authorize data analysis, policy analysis to prevent unintentional injustices, and implementation of policies and actions to dismantle or course-correct problematic systems.

Put simply, this is one way to hold ourselves and our local and state governments accountable for addressing racism head on. When we have an emergency affecting our residents safety and well-being we must act.

Why should Lexington take this action? Making a public declaration that racism is a public health crisis is the first step in intentionally embedding health equity in policy making. This is a way our government can set a clear and direct course toward addressing this crisis, while focusing on actions that are accountable for the intersectional and cross-sector approaches necessary to move towards equity.

How is racism a public health emergency? As a result of the trauma inflicted by racism and the purposeful disinvestment in social and economic well-being, people of color live with disproportionately higher cortisol levels, higher rates of chronic stress, higher rates chronic disease, lower infant birth rates, higher rates of COVID-19 infection and death and pay the ultimate price with their lives. In this time of a global pandemic, we can put these efforts toward immediate and life savings action.

In August of 2020, the Lexington Human Rights Committee formed a working group to address issues of bias, racism, inequity, exclusion and related challenges within our community. This group will be tasked with following up on our declaration of racism as a public health crisis. We will work together to end disparities in health outcomes and examine the role of race as a social determinant of health in our community.

**RESOLUTION OF
THE TOWN OF LEXINGTON, MA
HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE
DECLARAING THAT RACISM IS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS**

WHEREAS, racism is a social system with multiple dimensions: individual racism that is interpersonal and/or internalized, or systemic racism that is institutional or structural, and is a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks;

WHEREAS, race is a social construct, not biological;

WHEREAS, racism unfairly disadvantages specific individuals and communities, while unfairly giving advantages to other individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources;

WHEREAS, racism is a root cause of poverty and constricts economic mobility;

WHEREAS, racism causes persistent discrimination and disparate outcomes in many areas of life, including housing, education, employment, health care, and criminal justice, and is itself a social determinant of health;

WHEREAS, racism and segregation have caused and continue to exacerbate a health divide resulting in Black, Native American, Asian, Latinx and other racial minorities in Massachusetts bearing a disproportionate burden of illness and mortality including COVID-19 infection and death, heart disease, diabetes, and infant mortality;

WHEREAS, Black, Native American, Asian, Latinx and other racial minorities in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are more likely to experience poor health outcomes as a consequence of inequities in economic stability, education, physical environment, food, and access to health care and these inequities are, themselves, a result of racism;

WHEREAS, the scientific literature provides ample evidence that racism is a fundamental cause of worse health outcomes;

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth has defined and identified the importance of Environmental Justice in assessment of disproportionate burdens of disease; and finds that Environmental injustice leads to poor health outcomes and higher rates of asthma, cancer, low birth, mental health challenges;

WHEREAS, the collective prosperity and well-being of the Town of Lexington, Massachusetts depends upon equitable access to opportunity for every resident regardless of the color of their skin.

Now, Therefore It Be Resolved:

That the Human Rights Committee of the Town of Lexington (LHRC) does hereby declare that racism is a public health crisis affecting Lexington and communities across the Commonwealth, and commits itself to and recommends the Town commit to:

1. Working to progress as an equity and justice-oriented Town by continuing to identify specific activities to enhance diversity and to identify and ensure that anti-racism principles govern our leadership, staffing and contracting;
2. Promoting equity through policies approved by the Town and enhancing educational efforts aimed at understanding, addressing and dismantling racism and how it affects the delivery of health and social services, economic development and public safety;
3. Improving the type and quality of the data our town collects and the analysis of those data that might be important in identifying and assessing inequities;
4. Advocating locally for relevant policies that improve health in communities of color, and support local, state, regional, and federal initiatives that advance efforts to dismantle systemic racism;
5. Working further to solidify alliances and partnerships with other organizations that are confronting racism and encourage other local, state, regional, and national entities to recognize racism as a public health crisis;
6. Educating the community on anti-racism;

7. Supporting community efforts to amplify anti-racist voices, document racism in our community and engage actively and authentically with Black, Native American, Asian, Latinx and other racial minorities/communities and

8. Working with others to identify clear goals and objectives, including periodic reports to the community, to assess progress and capitalize on opportunities to further advance racial equity.

The Town of Lexington, Human Rights Committee