



Utah Public Health Association Supports HJR 13 and Addressing Racism as a Public Health Crisis

Salt Lake City, UT— COVID-19 has shown the tremendous strength and resilience of communities of color in Utah, while also highlighting long-standing inequities. Representing just below 25 percent of Utah’s total population, Utahns of color disproportionately experience many barriers to care. COVID-19 has underscored the gravity of these health disparities, with people of color experiencing much higher rates of COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. It is for these and other related reasons that the Utah Public Health Association wholeheartedly supports [Representative Sandra Hollins’ Joint Resolution declaring racism a moral and public health crisis](#).

The Utah Public Health Association (UPHA) believes racism is a barrier to health access and equity, and is a public health crisis that must be proactively addressed within our state. We thank Representative Hollins for her dedicated efforts to improve public health in Utah and remove systemic barriers to care, and our Legislature for lifting up this important issue. As UPHA, we hope to support and amplify the important message of HJR 13 to advance public health and health equity for all Utahns.

To ensure we, as a state, are addressing the root cause of inequities, it is important that we prioritize the implications of structural racism in public health policymaking and plans, as well as in budgeting and resource allocation. We must dismantle the barriers to access and care, and transform systems designed to exclude; we must establish and repair trust within communities and our institutions.

“Racism permeates our everyday lives, even if we do not readily acknowledge its power or pervasiveness... As public health professionals we must critically evaluate our work, our values, and our impact vis-à-vis racism. We are convinced that we have an ethical and professional responsibility to address racism as an inherent component of health equity and optimal health for all.” ^[1]

UPHA recognizes that the health of the entire public cannot truly be achieved as long as the lives of people of color are compromised by constraints, violence, trauma, and stress of different forms of racism. Large-scale solutions and actions are necessary at all levels—systemic, institutional, and individual: from applying a lens of racial equity within UPHA and the Utah public health community, to promoting policies and programs that advance health equity and justice for everyone.

Together, as public health professionals and as a community, we must, in the words of APHA Executive Director George Benjamin, “address racism as an ongoing public health crisis that needs our attention now.”

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About: Utah Public Health Association has been protecting and improving public health, achieving health equity, and working toward healthier Utah communities for more than 100 years.