

Insights

Racial Inequality and Injustice and the Health of America's Children

A Message from NICHQ CEO Scott D. Berns

Our nation is hurting. Many are afraid, angry, anxious, and frustrated as we witness institutional racism and social injustice, once again, ravaging communities of color.

The death of George Floyd was the tipping point that has brought days of protesting in nearly every U.S. city and around the world. People of all races are calling for an end to systemic racism and injustice. They are determined for their voices to be heard.

Individuals, families, and children continue to endure discrimination and trauma daily. NICHQ stands in solidarity with those opposed to the institutionalized racism in this country and, like many, we want meaningful change.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, communities of color are disproportionately impacted. The pandemic has exposed the racial disparities woven deeply into our cultural fabric, a legacy that dates back 401 years to when the first Africans were enslaved. This legacy leaves the African-American community more vulnerable and exposed to greater casualties. Many city governments and public health departments are calling racism a public health crisis and we agree. It is an underpinning of all the social determinants of health, which directly affects our work in eliminating infant and maternal mortality as well as supporting children and families of color who have a right to a better quality of life.

As a mission-driven nonprofit dedicated to driving dramatic and sustainable improvements in the complex issues facing children's health, we know racism hurts our children every day, generation after generation. Its impact is devastating. Research shows that racism is linked to birth outcome disparities and mental health problems, such as chronic stress and depression, for children and adolescents.

Our vision of a world where every child achieves optimal health is blocked by systemic racism at nearly every turn. So, as a nation, we must attack the problem head-on and find ways to eradicate systems of oppression in all areas of American life and build up systems that promote equality, equity and the rights and respect of all. As an organization, it makes our work, improving the health of all children, even more imperative. We must engage in authentic conversation, no matter how uncomfortable, to promote freedom of expression of ideals and concerns and a willingness to listen and act. We can no longer tolerate silence and ignorance impeding our progress toward equity and justice. And we must lead with humility – give up and share power to allow the communities' knowledge and experiences to help guide every change strategy. Everything we do should be viewed through a racial lens. Together, we can do more to make racial equity a priority.

Our commitment to our partners, our staff, our funders and all the parents and children we serve is unwavering. We all have seen first-hand how institutional racism results in poor health outcomes, and even death. In the coming days and years, we must push harder to level the playing field so that every family is treated fairly and with equity and may have a chance at a better life.

NICHQ is here to support your efforts so that together we can move toward a future where dignity, inclusion, and health equity become the norm – now and for the next generation and beyond.

Mr. Floyd, a 46-year-old black man, along with concerned and outraged onlookers, called for help – but their voices were ignored, and a man died. Systemic racism is unacceptable. Let's not continue to allow the voices for change fall on deaf ears.