

# Final Report



# Race and racism as a public health issue

A joint study completed by volunteers from the Olmsted County Human Rights Commission and the Olmsted County Public Health Services Advisory Board.

October 2022



# Executive summary

## Situation

The Olmsted County Board of Commissioners recognized the inequities and disparities associated with 'race and racism as a public health issue.' In August 2020, the Olmsted County Board passed a resolution (Resolution No. 20-153) asking two of its volunteer advisory groups – the Olmsted County Public Health Services Advisory Board (PHSAB) and the Olmsted County Human Rights Commission (HRC) – to jointly study and investigate racial disparities that result from systemic racism.

*See appendix 3e for complete County Board resolution document.*

## Background

Systemic, or structural, racism is not something you can touch, but exists in our foundation, and has been a part of our systems starting hundreds of years ago. Olmsted County acknowledges the impacts of systemic racism are real and that it is essential to understand, identify, and address institutional and systemic barriers.

## Assessment

Each identified Focus Area depicts:

- initial relevant population and programmatic data focused on racial disparities,
- lists draft recommendations,
- and presents qualitative and quantitative data from community engagement sessions.

## Recommendation

After the culmination of several months of research, analysis, community engagement, and discussion, the volunteer subgroup has finalized 42 recommendations across 10 focus areas\* for the County Board.

\*NOTE: Two focus areas have joint recommendations.

# Joint study: Race and racism as a public health issue

## final recommendations

### **Accountability:**

1. Ensure accountability for monitoring progress of racism as a public health issue.

### **Advisory boards:**

2. Reduce barriers to participate in Olmsted County advisory boards in order to increase black, indigenous, people of color (BIPOC) representation and voices of lived experiences.
3. Remove or change state statutes that inhibit participation on county boards.

### **Criminal justice:**

4. Work with community partners to ensure free expungement processes are readily available to people who have committed minor offenses.
5. Work to ensure people with criminal records have access to housing options.
6. Evaluate how effectively law enforcement and co-responders de-escalate and respond to people in mental health crisis.
7. Work with community partners and BIPOC community members to learn how to navigate interactions with law enforcement.
8. Work with community partners to support people in reexamining settled cases for the potential to re-open and review cases where errors have occurred.

### **Customer service:**

9. Gather input from persons being served to improve delivery of human-centered services in Olmsted County.
10. Assess all county services for awareness of and accessibility to BIPOC residents and persons served in the approach of 'No Wrong Door.' Take action accordingly.
11. Add additional Guiding Partners to Solutions (GPS) navigators, that are culturally responsive, to advocate for persons being served.
12. Implement 'Participatory Budgeting' practices, meaning Olmsted County leadership listens to and implements community member input on how public funds are allocated.

### **Data collection and use:**

13. Invest in infrastructure for secure data systems within Olmsted County agencies, to capture and organize data already regularly collected on persons served, so that the county can assess the quality and impact of programs and services. Systems should be efficient, interoperable, and timely across departments.
14. Building from above, work with the state of Minnesota to integrate Olmsted County data systems to efficiently report on needed data in a timely way to foster collaboration and benchmarking.
15. Olmsted County staff should use existing information to continuously improve disparate outcomes across race, ethnicity, etc.
16. Work alongside BIPOC communities being served to understand how data gathering methods resonate within their communities to inform and improve culturally responsive data gathering methods.

### **Financial health:**

17. Provide for continuous evaluation of the system for providing emergency assistance to ensure community members in need are not falling through the cracks.
18. Apply Pathways to Prosperity and Wellbeing (PTPW) as an organizational model and use this to implement a fully funded guaranteed basic income program for families / individuals experiencing poverty and to address problems with the benefits cliff.
19. Work with community partners to facilitate connections between community members and financial institutions to ensure culturally relevant financial education and reduce predatory practices.
20. Find ways to mitigate the negative impacts of the federal benefits cliff.

### **Housing (homelessness, rental assistance, home ownership):**

21. Expand emergency shelter options for families and youth.
22. Increase public and community partners' awareness and coordination of available housing programs and services.
23. Improve the systemic process to house people across the housing continuum.
24. Continue to assess whether the level of chronic homelessness in the county is declining and invest in stable housing to address the issue where needed.
25. Increase the number of affordable subsidized and rental options in Olmsted County for families below the 200% poverty line.
26. Provide direct financial assistance to support BIPOC individuals and families in securing rental housing.
27. Support passage of state anti-discrimination in housing legislation.
28. Given the history of red-lining and racial covenants, develop a comprehensive system alongside multi-sector partners to increase BIPOC home ownership with a focus on shifting BIPOC renters to owners.
29. Increase affordable home-buying options.



### **Organizational culture and systems:**

30. Strengthen organizational culture with strategies to support the five basic human needs (belonging, respect, choice, physical and psychological safety, and joy).
31. Each department creates DEI goals that must include increasing BIPOC Olmsted County staff and increasing multi-lingual Olmsted County staff.
32. Increase BIPOC leadership at the highest pay levels.
33. Increase DEI-focused FTE to lead efforts across the organization.
34. Establish, through One Olmsted\*, shared DEI definitions across Olmsted County.
35. Increase resources and funding for interpreters and translators.
36. Implement anti-racism training for Olmsted County Board of Commissioners, Olmsted County Department Leadership, and advisory board members.

*\*See page 11 for greater description of One Olmsted.*

### **Mental health and substance use:**

37. Inventory and expand mental health and substance use services for adults and youth to ensure strong mental well-being for all, including resiliency and coping skills and leveraging of peer support models.
38. Facilitate a community culture of safety, belonging, and connectedness to combat social isolation, particularly experienced by communities of color.
39. Support community organizations to embed harm reduction principles in mental health and substance use programming.
40. Inventory and expand access to culturally relevant mental health and substance use services.
41. Facilitate use of and access to Medication-Assisted Treatment for community members.
42. Facilitate system-wide changes that impact access to mental health and substance use services.