

Media Statement from CDC Director Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH, on Racism and Health

<https://www.cdc.gov/media/releases/2021/s0408-racism-health.html>

Media Statement

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Today, Rochelle P. Walensky MD, MPH, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and administrator of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), declared racism a serious public health threat. Adding action to words, she highlighted several new efforts CDC is leading to accelerate its work to address racism as a fundamental driver of racial and ethnic health inequities in the United States. She also unveiled a new website [“Racism and Health”](#) that will serve as a hub for the agency’s efforts and a catalyst for greater education and dialogue around these critical issues.

Statement from Rochelle P. Walensky, MD, MPH, Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the death of over 500,000 Americans. Tens of millions have been infected. And across this country people are suffering. Importantly, these painful experiences and the impact of COVID-19 are felt, most severely, in communities of color—communities that have experienced disproportionate case counts and deaths, and where the social impact of the pandemic has been most extreme.

Yet, the disparities seen over the past year were not a result of COVID-19. Instead, the pandemic illuminated inequities that have existed for generations and revealed for all of America a known, but often unaddressed, epidemic impacting public health: racism.

What we know is this: racism is a serious public health threat that directly affects the well-being of millions of Americans. As a result, it affects the health of our

entire nation. Racism is not just the discrimination against one group based on the color of their skin or their race or ethnicity, but the structural barriers that impact racial and ethnic groups differently to influence where a person lives, where they work, where their children play, and where they worship and gather in community. These social determinants of health have life-long negative effects on the mental and physical health of individuals in communities of color.

Over generations, these structural inequities have resulted in stark racial and ethnic health disparities that are severe, far-reaching and unacceptable.

As the nation's leading public health agency, CDC has a critical role to play to address the impact of racism on public health.

- We will continue to **study the impact** of social determinants on health outcomes, expand the body of evidence on how racism affects health, and propose and implement solutions to address this.
- With COVID-19 funding, we are **making new and expanded investments** in racial and ethnic minority communities and other disproportionately affected communities around the country, establishing a durable infrastructure that will provide the foundation and resources to address disparities related to COVID-19 and other health conditions.
- We are **expanding our internal agency efforts** to foster greater diversity and create an inclusive and affirming environment for all.
- We are **launching our new web portal "[Racism and Health](#)"** as part of our ongoing commitment to serve as a catalyst for public and scientific discourse around racism and health, and to be accountable for our progress.

Confronting the impact of racism will not be easy. I know that we can meet this challenge. I know that we can create an America where all people have the opportunity to live a healthy life when we each take responsibility and work together. I am committed to this work. I certainly hope you will lean in and join me.

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health threats. CDC is headquartered in Atlanta and has experts located throughout the United States and the world.