

Town of Amherst – Board of Health Statement on Racism and Public Health

September 2021

The Board of Health of the Town of Amherst recognizes that racism, including unconscious and systemic racism, threatens public health. Racism worsens the health of those it targets, resulting in racial and ethnic inequities in health. The Board resolves to work actively to end these health inequities by taking actions described below.

The American Public Health Association's 2016 Presidential Initiative, a National Campaign Against Racism, asserts that racism is:

- a social system with multiple dimensions: individual racism is internalized or interpersonal; systemic racism is institutional or structural, and
- a system of structuring opportunity and assigning value based on the social interpretation of how one looks that
- unfairly disadvantages some individuals and communities,
- unfairly advantages other individuals and communities and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources.

Racism worsens health because racial discrimination is stressful to those who experience it, and chronic stress causes many kinds of illness. Racism also affects the conditions in which people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age. Through its impact on these Social Determinants of Health, racism prevents people from reaching their full potential for good health. This makes racism a serious concern of the Amherst Board of Health and the Amherst Health Department. A statement of racism can lead to action through a meaningful process of accountability rooted in health equity and fair practices.

Racism has played a central role in U. S. history, starting with slavery and continuing to the present through individual acts as well as discriminatory practices, intentional and unintentional, on the part of governments, industry and commerce, all levels of public and private education, and the health care system. Marginalized groups are disadvantaged in all the social determinants of health; this marginalization is a fundamental cause of ill health.

Amherst necessarily shares the history of the country in which it is located, but in addition, this history is the history of Amherst itself. Black people in Amherst have been slaves who at that time were the legal property of white Amherst residents; housing in Amherst has been *de facto* segregated; lending institutions in Amherst followed standard practices that resulted in keeping residents of color from owning homes.

Current ethnic and racial disparities in the Amherst area are barriers to good health for Black and Latino residents, who have a lower average income, a higher poverty rate, a lower rate of home ownership, fewer transportation options, and less access to health

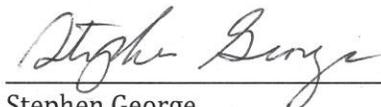
care, including vaccination against COVID disease. Racial and ethnic health inequities are well-documented in Massachusetts as a whole and in our region.

To address racial and ethnic health inequities in Amherst, the Board of Health is committed to the following actions:

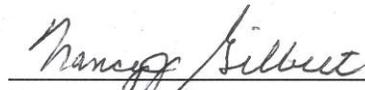
- Assessing the community’s health needs through a comprehensive community assessment that focuses on health inequities,
- Increasing funding for the Health Department to provide staffing and resources needed to improve outreach and effectiveness in communities of color,
- Evaluating policies, procedures, and regulations to ensure racial equity to improve health in communities of color is a core concern of the Amherst Board of Health and Health Department, and
- Supporting local, state, and federal initiatives that advance social justice.

In making this statement, the Board of Health joins with other organizations that have issued statements on racism and health, including the American Public Health Association, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the American Medical Association, and other Massachusetts municipalities and local Boards of Health.

Adopted by unanimous vote of the Amherst Board of Health, September 9, 2021.



Stephen George



Nancy Gilbert, Chair



Dr. Maureen Millea



Timothy Randhir

Data and sources for this statement can be found on the Amherst Board of Health website, <https://www.amherstma.gov/1312/Board-of-Health>.