

## Connections between racism and health

### 3

## Individuals and community groups

Ensuring Ohioans of color have a fair opportunity for good health

### Why is action needed?

Every Ohioan benefits when Ohio is healthy and economically vibrant. Though all Ohioans deserve the opportunity to be healthy, stark differences in health outcomes signal that not every Ohioan has a fair opportunity for good health. HPIO's *Health Value Dashboard™* highlights health disparities experienced by Ohioans of color, regardless of income or education level. Many barriers to good health experienced by communities of color are rooted in racism and centuries of unjust practices and policies.<sup>1</sup>

Despite these barriers, improvement is possible. Ohioans of all ages, races, ethnicities, incomes, faiths, political parties and areas of the state can take meaningful action to eliminate racism and improve health. We all have a role to play in creating and advancing fair opportunities for good health.

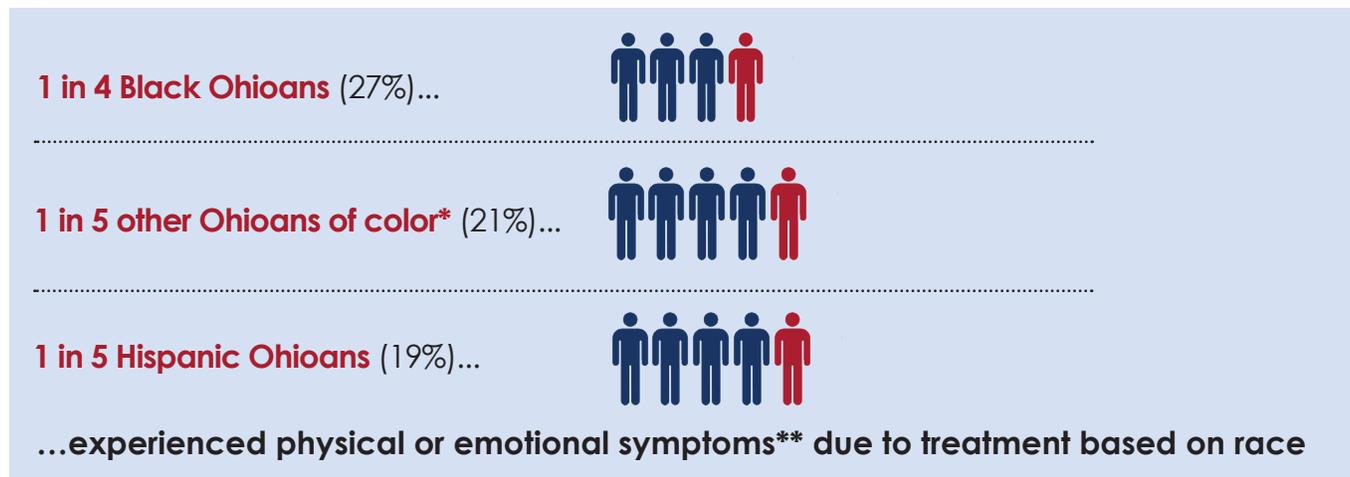
This fact sheet, the final in a series of three, outlines actions individuals and community groups can take to support the health and well-being of Ohioans of color and move Ohio toward a more economically vibrant and healthy future. Previous fact sheets provided action steps for **state and local policymakers** and **private sector organizations**.

### What barriers to health are experienced by Ohioans of color?

Unfair policies and practices in the public and private sectors can limit the potential for Ohioans of color to thrive. For example, centuries of housing and employment discrimination have resulted in neighborhood segregation, concentrated poverty and disinvestment from Black communities in Ohio that continue to this day. Individual stereotypes and beliefs rooted in racism can also be barriers to success for Ohioans of color.

Policies, practices, stereotypes and beliefs rooted in racism can result in trauma and toxic stress for people of color, which lead to poor health outcomes, including high blood pressure, heart disease, stroke and depression,<sup>2</sup> even contributing to a higher likelihood of early death.<sup>3</sup> An example of how treatment due to race, or people of color being treated differently because of their race and/or ethnicity, impacts individual health is highlighted in figure 1. Only 4% of white Ohioans reported experiencing physical or emotional symptoms because of treatment based on race in 2020.

Figure 1. **Health impacts of racism, Ohio, 2020**



\* Other communities of color include: Ohioans who are Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islanders, American Indians and other races. These categories could not be reported individually due to small sample size.

\*\* Physical symptoms include a headache, an upset stomach, muscle tension or a pounding heart. Feeling emotionally upset includes feeling angry, sad or frustrated.

Source: HPIO analysis of Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System

Racism is often viewed as a deliberate act of hate or discrimination toward people of another race.<sup>4</sup> However, the concept of racism is much broader and can manifest directly and indirectly across all levels of society. Figure 2 provides descriptions and examples of the different levels of racism, drawn from Race Forward's Four Levels of Racism Framework.<sup>5</sup>

## Levels of racism experienced by people of color

-  **Internalized racism**  
An individual's privately-held beliefs of prejudice, oppression and privilege  
.....  
**Example**  
**Privately held beliefs of prejudice.** Some people of color may have internalized negative views of their hair in its natural texture or style. Those are views that have been instilled or reinforced by Eurocentric societal beauty standards or organizational policy over generations.
  
-  **Interpersonal racism**  
When individuals, directly or indirectly, act on beliefs of prejudice, stereotypes, oppression or privilege by engaging in unfair treatment, bias, violence and/or hate  
.....  
**Example**  
**Direct acts of unfair treatment, bias, violence and/or hate.** People of color may be the target of racist slurs or jokes that play into untrue stereotypes about their race, ethnicity or culture.
  
-  **Institutional racism**  
Beliefs of prejudice, oppression or privilege that are directly or indirectly acted on or perpetuated by institutions or organizations  
.....  
**Example**  
**Out-of-school suspensions.** Institutional racism experienced in schools, such as officials suspending students of color at significantly higher rates than white students, reduces the amount of instruction students receive each year and contributes to racial differences in educational attainment.<sup>6</sup> In Ohio, school administrators suspend Black students at a rate over four times greater than that of their white peers for similar infractions.<sup>7</sup>
  
-  **Structural racism**  
When systems across society are intentionally or unintentionally structured in a way that results in discriminatory treatment towards a group of people  
.....  
**Example**  
**The criminal justice system.** Historically, the concept of race has been a critical part of the U.S. criminal justice system. In the 19th and 20th centuries, criminal justice policies explicitly targeted Black Americans and people of color, including black codes, vagrancy laws, convict leasing and Jim Crow laws.<sup>8</sup> Although the language of modern-day criminal justice policies is neutral regarding race, people of color are more heavily policed and experience significantly more barriers to justice because of structural racism in the criminal justice system.<sup>9</sup> As a result, Black Ohioans were incarcerated in state prisons at a rate five times that of white Ohioans in 2021.<sup>10</sup>

## What can individuals and community groups do?

Ohioans of all ages, racial and ethnic backgrounds, incomes, faiths, political parties and geographic areas can take meaningful action to eliminate racism and improve health. Examples of action steps that can be taken by individuals and community groups are outlined below.

Action steps	Examples of individuals and community groups taking action in Ohio
<p><b>1. Acknowledge</b> the effects of racism. Starting the conversation about how racism impacts Ohioans opens the door for creative, collaborative solutions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Laura Kohler, former President of the Ohio State Board of Education, wrote an <b>opinion article</b> condemning racism and stressing the importance of advancing equity in K-12 education.</li> <li>• The West Ohio Conference of the United Methodist Church published a <b>statement</b> denouncing racism and providing resources on topics such as recognizing and teaching children about racism.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Educate</b> friends, family and community members on the impacts of racism. This includes educating yourself and others on racism and opportunities to create change through books, films, podcasts, discussion groups and trainings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A group in Athens, Ohio started an <b>anti-racism book club</b> that met for weekly Zoom discussions in 2020.</li> <li>• Community members in Toledo, Ohio, participated in <b>free implicit bias training sessions</b> aimed at teaching participants about implicit racial bias.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Heal</b> yourself and others who have been impacted by racism. This means providing, supporting and promoting opportunities for healing, such as inclusive spaces for peers to discuss how they have been harmed by racism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students and community members can utilize programs such as the <b>Racial Healing Circles</b> offered at Otterbein University, which give small groups the opportunity to engage with others and heal from past experiences of racism.</li> <li>• Community organizers in Youngstown, Ohio held a <b>virtual event</b> on Facebook Live that gave community members an opportunity to discuss healing and how race has impacted personal health and relationships during the COVID-19 pandemic.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Advocate</b> for policies and programs that promote justice and fairness. This means supporting efforts to eliminate racism, such as sharing personal stories and testimony with policymakers or contributing resources to a community fund.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hundreds of Ohioans submitted <b>written testimony</b> supporting <b>Senate Concurrent Resolution 14</b> in 2020, which, if adopted, would have declared racism as a public health crisis in Ohio and suggested policy changes to promote racial equity.</li> <li>• In September 2020, the <b>Cleveland Black Futures Fund</b> was established by the Cleveland Foundation and its donors to invest in Black-led and Black-serving social change organizations, amassing more than \$4.3M in funding to date.</li> </ul>



### Building opportunities for health for every Ohioan

To ensure that every Ohioan can reach their full health potential, all forms of racism and discrimination must be eliminated. This includes individual actions and beliefs, but also encompasses discriminatory policies, practices and structures. Community members and groups can adapt each action step outlined above to address other forms of discrimination, such as ableism, ageism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, etc. HPIO's **Action Steps to Eliminate Racism** resource page includes additional resources to address racism and other forms of discrimination.

## Additional resources

Individual Ohioans and community groups have made a concerted effort to dismantle racism and other forms of discrimination. Every Ohioan has an active role to play in ensuring that they and their peers have the opportunity to reach their full health potential. The following resources provide guidance, tools and recommendations to support further action:

- **Implicit bias module series, Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity**  
This series includes four interactive modules that help participants understand the origins of implicit associations, uncover their biases and learn strategies to address them.
- **Project Implicit, Harvard University**  
Project Implicit provides Implicit Association Tests to assess unconscious attitudes and beliefs on topics such as race, gender, disability and skin tone.
- **Addressing racism: Anti-racism resources, University of Minnesota Alumni Association**  
This page provides books, webinars and tools that explain racial bias and systemic racism.
- **Healing from the effects of internalized oppression, Community Tool Box**  
This tool offers information on the impacts of racism and strategies for reducing the impacts of internalized oppression.
- **Truth, racial healing and transformation implementation guidebook, W.K. Kellogg Foundation**  
This guidebook is a community-based tool that works to engage individuals and organizations in dismantling systemic racism through active discussion of racial history, community building and organizing spaces for racial healing.
- **Tools & resources for achieving racial equity in policymaking, Independent Sector**  
This page provides resources that can help individuals and groups center racial equity into their policy and overall strategic work.

Learn more about the relationship between racism and health in HPIO's brief  
**Connections between racism and health**



## Notes

1. Health Policy Institute of Ohio. "Connections between racism and health: Taking action to eliminate racism and advance equity," September 2021.
2. Harrell, Camara Jules P., et al. "Multiple Pathways Linking Racism To Health Outcomes." *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 8, no. 1 (2011): pp. 143-157. doi: 10.1017/s1742058x11000178; see also Calvin, Rosie et al. "Racism and Cardiovascular Disease in African Americans." *The American Journal of the Medical Sciences* 325, no. 6 (June 2003): pp. 315-331. doi: 10.1097/00000441-200306000-00003
3. Williams, David R. and Selina A. Mohammed. "Racism and Health I: Pathways and Scientific Evidence." *American Behavioral Scientist* 57, no. 8 (2013): 1152-73. doi: 10.1177/0002764213487340
4. Bailey, Zinzi D, et al. "Structural Racism and Health Inequities in the USA: Evidence and Interventions." *The Lancet* 389, no. 10077 (2017): 1453-63. doi: 10.1016/s0140-6736(17)30569-x; see also *Race Reporting Guide: A Race Forward media reference*. Race Forward, 2015. <https://www.raceforward.org/reporting-guide>; see also Trepagnier, Barbara. *Silent Racism: How Well-Meaning White People Perpetuate the Racial Divide*. Place of publication not identified: Routledge, 2017.
5. *Race Reporting Guide: A Race Forward media reference*. Race Forward, 2015. <https://www.raceforward.org/reporting-guide>
6. Shollenberger, Tracey L. "Racial disparities in school suspension and subsequent outcomes." In *Closing the School Discipline Gap: Equitable Remedies for Excessive Exclusion*, edited by Daniel J. Losen, 31-43. New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2015.
7. HPIO analysis of 2017-2018 school year data from the U.S. Department of Education, Civil Rights Data Collection
8. "Slave Patrols: An Early Form of American Policing." National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund. Accessed Jan. 25, 2022. <https://nleomf.org/slave-patrols-an-early-form-of-american-policing>
9. "Examples of Black Codes: Mississippi" The New Jersey State Bar Foundation. Accessed January 25, 2022. [https://njsbf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Examples\\_of\\_Black\\_Codes.pdf](https://njsbf.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Examples_of_Black_Codes.pdf); and Little, Becky. "Does an Exception Clause in the 13th Amendment Still Permit Slavery?" *The History Channel*, April 20, 2021. <https://www.history.com/news/13th-amendment-slavery-loophole-jim-crow-prisons>
10. Gordon, Daanika. "The police as place-consolidators: The organizational amplification of urban inequality." *Law & Social Inquiry* 45, no. 1 (2020): 1-27. doi: 10.1017/lsi.2019.31
11. Health Policy Institute of Ohio. "Connections between criminal justice and health: Insights on justice and race," November 2021.