

Reference Document

Joint study on Race and Racism as a Public Health Issue



Board resolution 20-153

Olmsted County Board of Commissioners directs the Olmsted County Human Rights Commission and Public Health Services Advisory Board to study race and racism as a public health issue and report back findings and recommendations.

Olmsted County Board of Commissioners signed the resolution on August 4, 2020.

Timeline of joint study work

August 2020 – January 2022

Focus of joint study:

Study and investigate racial disparities that result from systemic racism as a public health issue with special emphasis on the services the county provides (goal statement on charter document).

Work led by 9 volunteer community members

- Study the issue and learn about county services.
- Draft preliminary recommendations.

February – December (2022)

Engagement & feedback

- Olmsted County staff
- Community organizations and partners
- Community members

Final report and recommendations presented to county board

Implementation planning

- Will fall under One Olmsted, Olmsted County's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion effort

Structure of focus area overview slides

Context for consideration

Information provided in this section is high-level population and programmatic data that was presented to the Joint Study Subgroup to help formulate draft recommendations.

“Focus Area”

Aim statement

A summary describing what the recommendations in the focus area are about and defining the high-level strategies.



Draft recommendations

The subgroup has created preliminary recommendations that span 10 focus areas, and the center around services Olmsted County provides.

Recommendations are listed in NO order of importance.

Issue statement

- Olmsted county staff identified need to evaluate success by internal benchmarks.
- Important to “build in accountability” for this work, National Association of Counties (NACo) webinar, Racism as a public health issue.

Accountability

Aim statement

Ensure there is **communication back to community members on the progress** of work that resulted from this study.



Draft recommendations

54. Develop evaluation metrics for implemented recommendations.
55. Establish an Accountability Advisory Board (made of members of impacted communities) to monitor progress of recommendations.



Context for consideration

- Currently, most Olmsted County advisory boards do not have diversity requirements for board membership in their by-laws, or statements regarding valuing diversity of membership. As a result, there is often a lack of diversity amongst members; this includes a lack of diversity in terms of race and ethnicity, place of residence in the county, and place of employment.
- “Organizations that reflect the communities most impacted by inequities are better equipped to understand and respond to community experiences.” MN Dept of Health, Cultivating a Health Equity ecosystem report.

Advisory boards

Aim statement

Support practices that ensure Olmsted County advisory board membership is **representative of the Olmsted County community.**

Draft recommendations

43. First step: Review and restructure advisory boards including recruitment, membership, processes (meeting format), board functions/responsibilities to the community, relationship with the commissioners to support increasing BIPOC representation of the community.
44. Second step: Increase BIPOC representation on advisory boards and increase relevance of advisory boards to BIPOC communities.
45. State legislative agenda*: Recommend changes to open meeting laws based on limitations to equitable participation.

*Instructions for this study from the Olmsted County Board of Commissioners included the option to identify potential state legislative priorities.

Olmsted County has 12 volunteer advisory groups that inform and provide guidance to several county departments.

Examples include:

- Environmental Commission
- Human Rights Commission
- Human Services Advisory Board
- Public Health Services Advisory Board

Issue statement

- Disparities exist in Minnesota's incarceration rate. Blacks, Latinos, and American Indians are overrepresented in MN prisons and jails.
- "Approximately, 60% of Olmsted County Patrol and Detention Deputies and Rochester Police Officers are certified in CIT [Crisis Intervention Training]. Emergency dispatchers are also given training around CIT."

Criminal justice

Aim statement

Remove barriers to those currently in crisis and those with a history in criminal justice systems to **achieve independent living**.

Support Olmsted County staff **training in de-escalation practices**.

Draft recommendations

50. Work with community partners to ensure free expungement processes are readily available to people to remove barriers to housing, employment, etc.
51. Work to ensure people with criminal records have access to housing options.
52. Add additional co-responders to the DFO (Dodge, Fillmore, Olmsted counties) Diversity, Equity and Community Outreach team to continue to address best practices of supporting people in crisis.
53. Require continuing education (16 hours recommended) for active and community-engaged law enforcement personnel on mental health and emotional de-escalation practices.



Context for consideration

- “Ensure our services to residents & customers are equitable, reduce barriers to use and promote inclusiveness” One Olmsted resolution.
- Respondents from the Residential Survey shared that there is a lack of clear understanding of what resources Olmsted County provides and how that can benefit the average person.
- Feedback from county staff, “Need more access to data that is meaningful, it helps us understand how we are impacting the people we serve and helps us do better.”

Customer Service

Aim statement

Support practices that **gather the voice of Olmsted County customers and service recipients.**



Draft recommendations

46. Gather input from service beneficiaries on satisfaction and improvement ideas.
47. Assess all county services for awareness of and accessibility to BIPOC residents and clients. Take action accordingly.
48. Add additional GPS (Guiding Partners to Solutions) navigators, that are culturally competent, to help clients access county services.
49. Implement participatory budgeting practices.

Context for consideration

- Data systems don't "talk" to each other. Understanding the entire picture of quantitative data regarding Olmsted County services will allow leadership to see and fill gaps.
- Some Olmsted County services data live in systems that are owned and operated by state departments. This constrains OC departments from accessing this data and being able to see a true picture of Olmsted County service data.

Data collection & use

Aim statement

Maximize and streamline Olmsted County data systems.

Draft recommendations

31. Invest in infrastructure for data systems (FTE (full time employee), new programs/systems).
32. Foster efficient and interoperable data systems to generate comprehensive, complete (e.g., demographic data), and timely data.
33. Track outcome data of clients that are disaggregated by race and ethnicity.
34. State Legislative Agenda*: Foster efficient and interoperable data systems to generate comprehensive, complete (e.g., demographic data), and timely data.

*Instructions for this study from the Olmsted County Board of Commissioners included the option to identify potential state legislative priorities.



Context for consideration

- Some departments are further along in creating a DEI plan while others do not have any plan. It is important for OC to have one unified plan that each department can work towards. (DEI Focus Group Feedback Report, January 2021)
- The residential survey showed unfavorable responses in the relevancy of Olmsted County, the understanding of its purpose, and the feeling that OC cares about its residents. When disaggregating that data, many of those responses came from residents of color.

Diversity/Equity/Inclusion

Aim statement

Foster a **welcoming community** the values **belonging, equity, diversity, and dignity** in people and ideas.



Draft recommendations

35. Assess organizational culture and develop strategies (retention plan) to support current and incoming workforce.
36. Each department creates DEI goals.
37. DEI goals to include increasing representation of BIPOC Olmsted County staff and staff with lived experience relative to department.
38. DEI goals to include increase BIPOC leadership at the highest pay levels.
39. Increase DEI focused FTE to lead efforts across organization.
40. Establish shared DEI terminology across organization.
41. Increase interpreters and bi-lingual staff.
42. DEI Training for County Board of Commissioners and Olmsted County Department Leadership.

Context to consideration

- Finances are one of the leading causes of stress in America.
- Data from the 2019 Olmsted County CHNA Community Survey reports 33 % of adults are financially stressed.
 - Disparities in financial stress are connected to retirement status, race, ethnicity, and income.
 - 31% of White, Non-Hispanic respondents reported being financially stressed, while 54% of All Others reported being financially stressed.

Financial stress

Aim statement

Ensure, and potentially increase, **financial assistance that is available** as well as look at **skill building strategies** for recipients of financial assistance.



Draft recommendations

26. Expand emergency assistance funding and eligibility.
27. Find strategies to fix benefits cliff.
28. Pilot universal basic income program for families/individuals. Grants for families/individuals.
29. Encourage new bank accounts when enrolling recipients in direct payment government programs. Work with community partners to offer accounts that meet an individual's current needs.
30. State legislative agenda*: Change eligibility requirements for federal benefits programs.

*Instructions for this study from the Olmsted County Board of Commissioners included the option to identify potential state legislative priorities.

Context for consideration

- Homelessness disproportionately affects black individuals when considering the percent of the population that they represent (HRA).
- Black community members have the highest percentage of renter-occupied households in Olmsted County (Maxfield Study). Rents climb regularly, while the cost of a mortgage relative to income decreases.
- There are huge disparities in home ownership in OC: 77% of residents overall and only 22% for Black families. African American and Hispanic populations are projected to grow around 16% in the next five years (Olmsted County Community Indicators).

Homelessness →

Housing

Aim statement

Invest in resources to **alleviate and/or eliminate homelessness**, address the lack of **affordable rental housing**, and **increase and support home ownership**, especially among BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities.

Home Ownership →

Draft recommendations

1. Expand emergency shelter for families.
2. Examine how effective coordinated entry is at addressing emergency shelter needs in the county.
3. Consider investment in permanent housing for the chronically homeless.
4. Pilot prevention opportunities aimed at different populations at risk of homelessness.
5. Identify/build more affordable subsidized and rental options in Rochester.
6. Increase the number of housing vouchers using local funds where possible.
7. Develop programs to increase home ownership within the BIPOC community with special emphasis on shifting BIPOC renters to owners.
8. Increase affordable home ownership options for people at 50% AMI (average monthly income).
9. Work with partners to lower the cost of home buying.
10. The County should support local nonprofit and mortgage lenders to get potential BIPOC, especially Black, home buyers' mortgage ready, particularly given the history of redlining and racial covenants.
11. Given current and growing need, identify additional resources that could be used to jumpstart and sustain programs that build home ownership among lower-income people, especially Black families¹₂



Context for consideration

- Olmsted County residents have indicated that stigma, disconnectedness, and a fragmented service delivery system negatively impact the core dimensions of mental wellness – health, home, purpose and community.
- The 2019 Community Health Needs Assessment reports 42.1% of people of color feel socially connected compared to 70% of white non-Hispanic people. 48.6% foreign-born feel socially connected. 38% of respondents self-reported mental health issues, 25% saw a mental health provider in the past 12 months and 8% delayed mental health care.

Mental health

Aim statement

Promote strategies to **reduce stigma and barriers** in BIPOC communities in the area of mental health and **increase access to culturally-sensitive providers**.

Support Olmsted County staff **training in de-escalation practices**.



Draft recommendations

21. Promote public awareness/education and address culturally specific stigma about mental health and wellbeing.
22. Promote social connection/social connectedness; work on eliminating social isolation within specific cultural communities.
23. Enable and expand access to current mental health programs.
24. Facilitate a network of mental health providers that can match patient need to culturally sensitive provider.
25. Decrease barriers to access mental health professionals. (Rationale: general lack of access / availability to all communities, but particularly BIPOC communities).

Context for consideration

- Youth drug use (of any kind) increased since 2016, and significant disparities exist by race, particularly for E-cigarettes and prescription drugs biggest issues. (2021-2023 Olmsted County Community Health Improvement Plan, CHIP)
- Community members said they were not aware of all the recovery services offered by the county. They asked for more marketing that was reflective of their community members. (2020-2021 CHIP Community Dialogues)
- Community members stated that increased access to peer support programs would help reduce stigma felt by going through substance use treatment. (2020-2021 CHIP Community Dialogues)

Substance use

Aim statement

Support strategies that **prevent substance use and support, resiliency, reduce harm and support recovery.**

Prevention and Resiliency
→

12. Further education and outreach/marketing of substance use recovery services.
13. Provide substance use prevention education in elementary schools within existing programs (school-aged childcare and community schools) or new programs.
14. Explore opportunities to support youth mentorship within existing programs (school-aged childcare and community schools) or new programs.
15. Support youth resiliency skill development efforts in existing programs (school-aged childcare and community schools) or new programs.
16. Explore ways to increase substance free events for the broader community.

Harm Reduction
→

17. Create programs focused on substance use and harm reduction.
18. Evaluate current substance use and harm reduction programs for efficacy.

Recovery
→

19. Increase access (transportation, time off work, home program, remote service) to lower cost substance use treatment/peer support programs.
20. Inventory and expand medication-support substance use treatment programs.



Shared definitions

○ **Systemic Racism:** Systematic policies and practices within institutions that disadvantage certain racial or ethnic groups (see charter).

Examples:

- Government policies that explicitly restricted the ability of people to get loans to buy or improve their homes in neighborhoods with high concentrations of African Americans (also known as “red-lining”).
- City sanitation department policies that concentrate trash transfer stations and other environmental hazards disproportionately in communities of color.

- **Diversity** includes all the ways in which people differ, and it encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued.
- **Equity** recognizes that each person has different circumstances and allocates the exact resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.
- **Inclusion** is authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.
- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)** is a term used to describe policies and programs that promote the representation and participation of different groups of individuals.

Shared definitions

- **De-escalation** is a human behavior that is intended to prevent escalation of conflicts. It may also refer to approaches in conflict resolution.
- **Intersectionality** is a framework for understanding how aspects of a person's social and political identities (race, age, class, gender, etc.) combine to create different modes of discrimination and privilege
- **Public Health Issue** is something that significantly impacts the health of a community. Health is not just about the food we eat or the exercise we get – it is also about where we live and work, our access to recreation and clean air and water, and our opportunities for success.
- **BIPOC** is a term referring to “Black and/or Indigenous People of Color.” While “POC” or People of Color is often used as well, BIPOC explicitly leads with Black and Indigenous identities, which helps to counter anti-Black racism and invisibilization of Native communities. It is inclusive of Hispanic and Latino individuals who may identify as white.
- **Benefits Cliff**, for a person receiving public assistance, is the point at which their net income will decrease if they have a wage increase, due to a greater loss in benefits than the wage increase compensates for.
- **Participatory Budgeting** is a democratic process in which community members decide how to spend part of a public budget.

Many of the definitions used are from the Racial Equity Tools Website (www.racialequitytools.org/glossary). If you want to learn more about racial equity and related terminology, this is a great resource to reference.

Resource list of Olmsted County data

- Comprehensive Housing Needs Analysis for Olmsted County, Minnesota (Maxfield Study)
- Olmsted County's strategy, budget, and performance website
 - Residential Survey Report
 - Olmsted County Community Indicators
- Community Health Needs Assessment
- Community Health Improvement Plan
- Olmsted County COVID-19 Impact Survey Report

Not an exhaustive list of resources