



## **Governor's COVID-19 Equity Response Team**

*May 28, 2020*

The Governor's COVID-19 Equity Response team is hereby established and charged with developing a recommended strategy to address the disproportionate impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and to oversee the implementation of the recommended plan of action.

The team, comprised of thought leaders in racial/ethnic disparities and health equity, will operate for 30 days and during that time, generate a recommended strategic plan around the following key components:

### **I. Collection and ongoing release of demographic data**

Collecting appropriate race and ethnicity demographic data is foundational to identifying and understanding disparities in access, utilization and outcomes. Though challenges continue to exist in consistently and accurately capturing this data, New Hampshire continues to improve its data collection effort in order to provide a clearer depiction of the impact on all populations. The state began releasing race/ethnicity identified COVID-19 cases with the April 20<sup>th</sup> Weekly Summary Report and expanded its April 27<sup>th</sup> report to include hospitalization and mortality data. Anticipated enhancements include reporting on case rates and rate ratios to more clearly quantify the resulting disparities in health outcomes from the pandemic, and various means of visualizing the data, which are currently under exploration. The Response Team will undertake a more complex analysis to explore the underlying conditions/comorbidities present at the time of death. Continuous efforts to improve the quality and completeness of race/ethnicity reporting are being pursued and capacity to disaggregate important COVID-19 indicators by other significant socio-demographic identifiers is being explored by the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services. The Equity Response Team will work with the state team to help ensure race and ethnicity data continues to accurately captured and utilized to respond to the disparities and inform change.

### **II. Conduct a thorough analysis of all available data using a cross-cultural research method to examine the social, cultural, and systemic factors contributing to differences and disparities in COVID-19 related outcomes.**

The COVID-19 Equity Response Team members will use cross-cultural, equity-focused evaluation and other methodologically sound research methods to examine the underlying systemic and structural determinants of the disparities evident in the NH COVID-19 dataset. Analysis of the social, cultural and economic factors contributing to the differences is needed to appropriately interpret the meaning and significance of the disparities data. Findings will be disseminated appropriately so they can be readily understood by the public, affected community members, service providers, and policy-makers. Findings will inform policy

recommendations including where and how to focus needed resources (such as equitable ways to distribute resources).

In addition to the team members who bring significant understanding and expertise on racial/ethnic disparities, academics from various disciplines and institutions from across New Hampshire will be engaged in an advisory capacity. Needed areas of further study will be identified and recommended for funding such as research that looks at historical oppression and trauma, as well as systemic issues that have impact on NH communities. In addition, strengths-based asset identification and mapping that can be leveraged to support these communities will be examined. This research will be used to inform action or recommendations for policy, practice and programming.

### **III. Identify and recommend specific resources that could be allocated to address these disparities**

The Equity Response Team will immediately put forth recommendations for allocation of COVID-19 specific funding coming into the state to support existing and emerging needs related to the underlying inequities in outcomes.

Given the community-specific needs that have been identified to the Office of Health Equity, The Response Team will immediately review the use of COVID Response Community Health Workers / Promotores de Salud / Community Health Representatives to be employed to serve in the affected communities who are suffering disproportionately from COVID-19. Areas of focus will include developing capacity to connect directly to people in communities, bridge the gaps, help people navigate systems and obtain the information, services and resources they need from trusted members of their communities. Additionally, this network of COVID CHWs could provide much needed culturally and linguistically tailored capacity to help with contact tracing.

### **IV. Within 30 days, identify and recommend achievable steps for the State and other stakeholders to consider undertaking to remedy the disparate impact of COVID-19, which is likely to be a public health concern for months, if not years to come**

The newly established COVID-19 Equity Response team will identify sustainable opportunities to address, mitigate and remedy the disparate impact of COVID-19. Recommended exploratory options include:

- Embedding community leaders who can bring an equity lens / lived experience perspective on the GOFERR and other COVID-related advisory groups and taskforces.
- Ensuring appropriate representation from equity experts within the operations of the COVID-19 response teams.
- Leveraging and partnering with existing COVID-related public health efforts that have an intentional focus on equity such as the State Health Assessment/State Health Improvement Plan (SHA/SHIP), and the New Hampshire COVID Equity Task Force, comprised of over 50 individuals and organizations across NH representing multiple

sectors and communities who came together to address issues of equity, for historically marginalized groups, arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and response.

- Ensuring established public health programs implement use of the Equity Review Toolkit recently created by the DPHS Equity Council and participate in anti-bias and cultural responsiveness training in their COVID-related efforts (including COVID response staff, such as contract tracing workers).
- Implementing well-established best practices for COVID-related efforts, promoting equity throughout the State Agencies as all contribute to upstream determinants of health including:
  - Collection of race/ethnicity data to permit disaggregation to identify disparities will be stressed throughout all state agencies;
  - Systems and processes for communication access will be created or made more robust throughout state Government; and
  - Promotion of the Community Health Worker workforce.

### **COVID-19 Equity Response Team**

The COVID-19 Equity Response Team members have been selected based on their connection to the affected communities, understanding of and thought leadership in racial/ethnic disparities and health equity, as well as their grounding in a systems-level approach to health and wellness:

- Chair: Trinidad Tellez, MD, Director, Office of Health Equity, DHHS
- Bobbie Bagley, MS, MPH, RN, CPH, Director, Division of Public Health & Community Services, Nashua
- Kirsten Durzy, MPH, Equity Council lead, public health evaluation and narrative/storytelling expert, Division of Public Health Services, DHHS
- Rogers Johnson, President, Seacoast NAACP, Chair of Governors Advisory Council on Diversity and Inclusion
- Dottie Morris, PhD, Associate Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion, Keene State College

Advisory team members representing needed additional voices/perspectives, constituencies, academic disciplines, and areas of specific expertise will be engaged as needed.

**DHHS Executive Sponsor:** Ann Landry, MBA, Associate Commissioner, Population Health

**Timing:** The COVID-19 Equity Response Team will begin meeting immediately and present recommendations within 30 days.