

Community Legal Aid

A non-profit law firm serving the legal needs of low-income individuals and families in central northeast Ohio



www.communitylegalaid.org

Race shouldn't dictate your health

by Marie Curry, Managing Attorney

It's been over a year since Ohio's Minority Health Strike Force issued its blueprint on advancing health equity following the initial impact of COVID-19 on our state. This document laid out 34 ways to actively respond to the health needs of Ohioans of color.

As of today, the 34 action items the strike force listed in this document are either not happening, or they're happening so subtly that it's hard to tell they're happening. Either way, Ohio's minority communities have yet to reap the benefits of these recommendations.

Today, we want to imagine a world where these recommendations are implemented. What would our health system look like? How would our residents benefit? What would this mean for social equity and justice?

- 1. People would be healthier.** We would have a healthcare system operating under principles of trauma-informed care. People of color would get the care they need without exposing themselves to implicit bias. They would go to the doctor because they would feel heard, like their doctor understood their perspective, instead of pigeonholing them or offering advice that isn't feasible for them. They would be able to trust the healthcare system instead of experiencing discrimination or being made to feel like their way of life is somehow "less than" the majority white experience. And these positive interactions with the healthcare system would permeate through generations, breaking the cycle of poor outcomes from sustained, generational trauma.
- 2. People would be housed.** We would have an equitable housing system that meets the demand. There would be resources available to improve access and expand affordable housing for working-class and low-income Ohioans. People would be able to rent safe, affordable homes, regardless of the source of their income. If they were able to pay their rent, they wouldn't be kicked out. And they could access lending products to purchase their own home and build generational wealth.
- 3. People would be better off financially.** People would have more meaningful employment opportunities and would be able to work. They would make a living wage that would cover their

basic needs, including food, medications, and housing. It wouldn't take people an hour and a half each direction to get to work because of multiple bus transfers. Parents would have childcare they could rely on and get to reasonably. These new realities would reduce generational poverty and improve financial equity across our state.

This month, we celebrate Infant Mortality Awareness Month. We at Legal Aid, along with our medical-legal partners at local hospitals and public health departments, are acutely aware of the devastating disparities that persist for Black and Brown moms and babies, for sure, but also for our broader communities of color across our state.

As long as the Minority Health Strike Force recommendations continue to gather dust on a shelf, Ohio will continue to have horribly disparate health outcomes where our minority neighbors get sick and die more often than their white counterparts, from COVID-19, and from everything else -- heart disease, diabetes, kidney failure, and more. These Ohioans deserve better.

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