

The Honorable Speaker of the House Rep. Melissa Hortman

Sept. 8, 2020 rev.1

Re: Disparate Health Impacts of COVID-19 on Communities of Color
Social Determinants of Health - Disparities Created by COVID-19 and Responses

Beyond how COVID-19 is affecting everyone, people of color face more disparities in responses and access to what's available for recovery. These include:

1. Healthcare: There are no real solutions for getting healthcare needed when there's fear of being more susceptible to getting COVID-19 in seeking healthcare, that disparities in services would still remain and increase especially by a provider who had racial bias, and that seeking healthcare would still result in not getting the healthcare needed.

Accessible listings of resources and low-cost safe healthcare providers would help reduce the barriers. Higher costs, premiums, and medicine need offsets and better negotiation with insurers and manufacturers.

2. Employment: There have been significant job loss, especially in the industries most affected who employ low wage people of color. Those who are low wage as "essential workers" face higher risks of getting COVID-19. **Perhaps prioritizing employment to hire those with more to lose than others by being unemployed.** Many high wage corporate employees have lots of personal and company funds to "weather the storm", and don't need the grants, subsidies, donations as others do.

Online work is a must. People of color are most affected by not having access to the Internet, computers, and necessary supplies for online work. **Government can partner with others to provide the help needed as a basic necessity.**

Entrepreneurs and small businesses have significant losses with no funds or insufficient funds for recovery. Even among funds available for COVID-19, requirements to get the funds are too rigid to allow for methods of doing business used by people of color, especially immigrants, refugees, and those not experienced enough in what forms require to do it themselves. Larger businesses have dedicated skilled/trained staff who only do accounting, forms, etc. Entrepreneurs and small businesses need skilled volunteers to help. Many have to do all the work themselves, plus the work that's supposed to bring in the revenue. **Besides easier access to grants, subsidies, donations, etc. – these smaller businesses and entrepreneurs need a different category than competing against the larger businesses for funds.** Also, larger businesses have more "cushion" to absorb costs and don't need the funds as much as the smaller business do.

Add to this: those hit by vandalism, theft and damages from the riots, destruction of their businesses – have a harder path to recovery. While people of color were blamed for the fires, theft and damages because of how it was covered by media – it was mostly businesses of people of color that were hit. There were photos also taken of perpetrators who were no "people of color" that received little to no publicity. And people of color are not part of the supremacists groups doing damage.

3. Housing: Moratoriums on evictions, utilities, and other housing expenses have helped. But what happens when it ends? **There appears to be no solutions for transitions that need to happen, like putting expenses on the back-end of mortgages, waiving expenses entirely, subsidies, etc. to help get people back on track.** Homelessness and risk of homelessness need real and sustainable solutions.

4. Education: Online education is a must. Students of color are most affected by not having access to the Internet, computers, and necessary supplies for online education. **This should be funded as a basic necessity.**

Children and students are more affected by racism of classmates and educators than adults are. It will last a lifetime and can affect their life choices and decisions. **They need the right kind of support to be resilient.**

5. Justice: The “justice system” needs reform because racism is imbedded throughout the system both systemically and as a vehicle for individuals misusing the system. Details are too extensive and complicated to get into here.

There are racially bias persons who blame people of color for their problems, especially Minnesota Asians who never were in China nor Chinese - for COVID-19 because of media saying it was first reported in China. **Besides spreading false rumors and making false statements - false police and other reports have been filed which wastes precious resources and funds of their victims and the courts.** This has to stop including dismissing and expunging cases based on racism.

Many are working on reforms needed in public safety especially where people have cause to fear the people who are supposed to keep them safe. **It takes partnerships, cooperation, and deep solutions.**

6. Human Services: More support is needed in transforming services to “human services”, especially in “Child Protection” which is not protecting the child, but doing harm to children and families of color. A paradigm shift is needed to focus on the needs of children and families, connecting them to what’s available, and seeking solutions for the gaps.

In services and facilities for the elderly, there’s fear that going to a facility either voluntarily or by court order – will lead to getting COVID-19 and death. **More can be done in making these facilities safe and keeping people there healthy.**

7. Revenue: More help is needed in access to programs, assistance and other options especially for those with low income. Barriers include but are not limited to: a lack of understanding of the processes, lack of skills and abilities, not enough time to meet deadlines, lack of help overcoming obstacles in getting what’s needed in forms/ documents/ evidence, etc. By the time some people find the help or get what’s needed to complete the requirements – the deadlines have passed. **State and internal policies should include provisions and accommodations for people of color facing inequities and barriers.**

8. Commerce and Licensing Boards: More scholarships, reduced fees and waivers are needed for education and training to be licensed in a profession, especially if it’s a means of re-employment from a COVID-19 job loss. There could also be special categories of licensing or certifications as done in some professions based on amount of education and training.

9. Transportation: Bus service and affordable transportation is so essential to all aspects of living. Service is not back up to the level needed, used car prices have increase over 16% with higher rates of interest and costs for people of color. **Choices of no transportation because of lack of service and/or higher costs needs better solutions including partnerships with sellers and repair shops to reduce prices for essential services workers and those most in need.**

These are different times where people have had to learn to live differently. Some have adapted better than others, some have excelled in innovations (including mask designs). But most people know that society can’t go back to doing things as they’ve done in the past. People have to think of what new ways of living can be and should be.

Around March before “asymptomatic positive” was determined, we said we should do things as if everyone had COVID – do things to stay safe and healthy, more PPE, do more than social distancing should be done, the list goes on.

Finding a vaccine is not the entire solution unless it’s as common a prevention as other vaccines that prevent fatalities. And there will be “hold-outs” of people who won’t get vaccinated anyway. **Until that long time comes – encourage transformative creativity, innovations, thinking/beings “outside the box”.**

The people need legislators, Cabinet members and the Governor to be leaders in these areas. We look forward to being what help and support we can in your endeavors.

Respectfully submitted, Jean Lee, Pres. Exec. Dir.
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