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**Chicago healthcare organizations band together to take action on systemic racism in healthcare**

*36 hospitals, health centers pledge to work to improve health equity across the city, focusing on vulnerable neighborhoods*

Calling systemic racism a public health crisis, three dozen Chicago healthcare organizations are pledging to do more to overcome health disparities in minority communities and ensure greater health equity across the city.

The group, which began their work through Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s Racial Equity Rapid Response Team, initially joined forces to focus on COVID-19 and its disproportionate impact on minority neighborhoods by making testing more accessible, implementing contact tracing, and increasing distribution of PPE across the South Side and the West Side. The organizations expanded their work beyond the pandemic in the wake of the horrifying and unconscionable deaths of George Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and others.

“Racism results in generational trauma and poverty, while also unquestionably causing higher rates of illness and death in black and brown communities,” the organizers said in an open letter to the Chicago community. “We have seen — in its rawest form — how the trauma of systemic racism adds to the historical injustices that have disproportionately affected communities of color.”

The 36 organizations, which include federally qualified health centers, safety net hospitals and major academic medical centers, collectively care for more than 8 million patients in the Chicago area.

“This statement represents an important first step, but the real work is just beginning,” said Carmen Vergara, Chief Operating Officer of Esperanza Health Centers. “We need to continue challenging ourselves to acknowledge and address the deep, structural ways in which racism affects communities of color – from lack of meaningful economic opportunities to issues of over-policing, housing insecurity and mass incarceration. Most importantly, we need to hold ourselves and each other accountable for the vision of change we’re articulating here.”

Dr. David Ansell, senior vice president for community health equity at Rush University Medical Center and associate provost for community affairs at Rush University, said the collaboration among the 36 healthcare organizations will be the key to achieving transformational change.

“We hope that this statement by Chicago health providers naming racism as a public health crisis will lead to meaningful structural change across a number of our public and private systems from the healthcare to the criminal justice system,” Ansell said.

The groups, which have a long history of working to overcome disparities in the communities they serve, committed to take seven action steps to advance their work. These include:

* Re-examining institutional policies with an equity lens and making any policy changes that promote equity and opportunity.
* Improving access to primary and specialty care.
* Continuing to focus on helping communities overcome chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease and asthma.
* Continuing to advocate for investments that create innovative solutions to achieve enduring improvements in access, quality and health outcomes for our communities.
* Continuing their commitment to hiring locally and promoting leaders of color.
* Renewing and expanding each organization’s commitment to providing anti-racism and implicit bias training for physicians, nurses and staff.
* Advocating for increased funding for social needs, social services and programs that promote social justice.

“As part of this collaborative work, we are answering the call to eradicate the disparities that put our South Side communities at higher risk for chronic illness and infectious disease like COVID-19,” said Brenda Battle, vice president of UChicago Medicine’s Urban Health Initiative and its Chief Diversity, Inclusion and Equity Officer. “Working with our partner healthcare providers, we are committed to addressing systemic racism and dedicating our resources and research to achieving health equity and the highest standards of patient care.”

Marcus C. Betts, Assistant Vice Chancellor, UI Health, called the open letter “a bold first step.”

“The commitments that each institution has made activates a reinvigorated social contract that circumscribes and elevates our shared responsibilities to our city and state,” Betts said. “Building on the racial equity platform created by Mayor Lightfoot, we look forward to enthusiastically continuing this work with other stakeholders.”

The full joint statement is attached to this news release. Institutions that signed the letter are:

Access Community Health Network

Advocate Aurora Health

AHS Family Health Center

Alivio Medical Center

AMITA Health

Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago

Aunt Martha’s Health & Wellness

Chicago Family Health Center

Cook County Health

Erie Family Health Centers

Esperanza Health Centers

Friend Health

Heartland Alliance Health

Howard Brown Health

La Rabida Children’s Hospital

Lawndale Christian Health Center

Loretto Hospital

Medical Home Network and MHN ACO

Mercy Hospital and Medical Center

UI Health Mile Square Health Center

Near North Health Service Corporation

New Roseland Community Hospital

NorthShore University HealthSystem

Northwestern Medicine

Norwegian American Hospital

Oak Street Health

PCC Community Wellness Center

PrimeCare Health Community Health Centers

Rush University System for Health

Saint Anthony Hospital

Sinai Health System

South Shore Hospital

St. Bernard Hospital

TCA Health, Inc.

University of Chicago Medicine

University of Illinois Hospital & Health Sciences System (UI Health)

Civic Consulting Alliance, a nonprofit organization marshalling collaborative, pro bono investments to get big things done for Chicago, is coordinating the work of the Racial Equity Rapid Response Team and supported the development and organization of the joint statement.

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