



## Whatcom County Board of Health Adopts Resolution Recognizing Racism as a Public Health Crisis

**BELLINGHAM, WA** – At its meeting on Tuesday, November 24, the Whatcom County Council, acting as the Health Board, passed [a resolution affirming that racism constitutes a public health crisis](#) in Whatcom County, joining other cities and counties across the state and the nation with this resolution and committing to take steps toward racial equity.

“The first step in healing is to recognize and diagnose the symptoms,” said Barry Buchanan, Chair of the Whatcom County Council and Health Board. “The data clearly show disparities in health outcomes for diverse communities. This resolution helps us to acknowledge those disparities and begin the healing process, and take actions to correct these societal flaws.”

The Public Health Advisory Board, working closely with the Whatcom County Health Department, drafted the resolution and presented it to the Health Board for consideration in early October. “This resolution is a critical step that will set the stage for the health department’s work toward undoing racism and the foundational effects it has on health and well-being,” said Health Department Director Erika Lautenbach.

“Affirming that racism is a public health crisis allows us to acknowledge that racism is built into our systems, invites accountability, and allows us to take action,” said Councilmember Carol Frazey, Chair of the Public Works and Health Committee. “Now we can begin to work together toward racial equity, justice, and better health outcomes.”

The resolution commits the Health Board to actively participate in the dismantling of systemic racism through deliberate funding and policy decisions. Specific actions identified in the resolution include:

- Implementing training on the following topics for all elected officials, County staff and members of boards, commissions and committees: implicit bias, trauma informed practices, and review of health disparities.
- Assessing and revising County department policies, procedures, and ordinances to ensure racial equity and transparency are core elements.
- Ensuring that hiring practices provide equitable opportunities for people of color to be employed to help ensure the diversity in our workforce represents the diversity in our community.
- Promote diversity of race within county boards and commissions.
- Supporting community efforts to alleviate issues of racism and bias and engaging actively and authentically with communities of color wherever they live.
- Building and strengthening alliances with other organizations that are confronting racism, encouraging other agencies to recognize racism as a crisis, including considering County membership in the [Government Alliance on Race and Equity](#) (GARE), and involving community representation and input in matters of historic and continued racial injustice.

Additionally, the resolution commits the Health Board to evaluate and support policies that are consistent with the principles of equity of access, services, and treatment of all people regardless of race, color, or ethnicity and ensure that such policies do not perpetuate or exacerbate racial disparities within the county.

The resolution also includes a commitment to collect data and monitor progress toward stated goals. Implementation of the resolution will, in part, fall upon the Whatcom County Administration.

Whatcom County Executive Satpal Sidhu supported and welcomed the adoption of the resolution. “I appreciate the Public Health Advisory Board’s strong advocacy for this resolution, and I was pleased to see it adopted by County Council after extensive discussions,” Executive Sidhu said. “On the same day the Council also approved the biennium budget, which includes funding for my proposal to create a countywide Racial Equity Commission. I am very hopeful that this commission will take the next steps, going beyond declarations and identifying specific actions to address systemic racism.”

For more information, please see the Public Health Advisory Board’s presentation on [racism and public health](#) at a special council meeting of the Health Board on Tuesday, Oct. 6.

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