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Wisconsin Public Health Association Calls for Unified Front Against Racism

On May 22, 2018, the membership of the Wisconsin Public Health Association unanimously passed a resolution declaring “Racism is a public health crisis”¹. This resolution acknowledges that racism causes persistent discrimination, is a social determinant of health and is linked to poor health outcomes. The public health community has a responsibility to acknowledge racism, advocate for equitable policies and inform the public discourse. Part of informing public discourse is shining a light on coded language and denial.

There is a current national conversation about what constitutes racism. Since the civil rights movement, discourse has moved from debating whether or not discrimination and racism are “just”, to needing to prove that racism still exists in our society². While institutional racism and discriminatory policies do untold damage, words matter too. Exposure to racist speech is traumatic. National discourse that denies the presence of racism in our society is not helpful and dismantling racism need not be a partisan issue. American University scholar Ibram X. Kendi recently said “The denial of racism, the defensiveness about racism is essential to racism itself. It’s the heartbeat of racism³.”

In healthcare we know that we cannot treat a condition that hasn’t been diagnosed; as a society, we cannot eliminate racism if we deny its existence- in whatever form it takes. The Wisconsin Public Health Association calls upon local, state and national leaders to acknowledge that racism is an ongoing problem in the United States; commit to calling for an end to racist language, practices and policies; listen to people who have experienced racism; and value and affirm the human rights of all people.

Individuals and organizations can assert their recognition of the toll of racism and commit to action by signing on to the WPHA Resolution that Racism is a Public Health Crisis, coordinated in partnership with the UW-Population Health Institute’s Mobilizing Action Toward Community Health (MATCH) Group and other statewide partners: www.wiracismdeclaration.org.

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1. WPHA Resolution, [“Racism is a Public Health Crisis”](#)
 2. Racial Equity tools.org. *Naming and Framing Racism*.
 3. Ibram X. Kendi. NPR Interview July 18, 2019. www.npr.org

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