

# Officials in the largest county in Ohio say racism is a public health crisis

By Leah Asmelash, CNN

**(CNN)** Racism has officially been declared a public health crisis in Ohio's largest county.

Commissioners in Franklin County, which encompasses the state's capital of Columbus, passed [a resolution](#) on Tuesday that asserts racism "rises to the definition of a public health crisis proposed by Dr. Sandro Galea."

Galea, dean at Boston University School of Public, notes a public health crisis is when "the problem must affect large numbers of people, it must threaten health over the long-term, and it must require the adoption of large scale solutions."

The county's resolution references more than 100 studies that have linked racism to worse health outcomes, and outlines the ways systemic racism impacts multiple areas of life, including housing and education.

"Racism unfairly disadvantages specific individuals and communities, while unfairly giving advantages to other individuals and communities, and saps the strength of the whole society through the waste of human resources," the Board of Commissioners [resolution](#) states, "and Franklin County's collective prosperity depends upon the equitable access to opportunity for every resident regardless of the color of their skin."

## **Coronavirus: a 'contemporary example of such disparity'**

Franklin County is about 24% black, according to [data from the US Census](#). White people make up 67.2% of the county's population.

Citing the Health Policy Institute of Ohio, the Board of Commissioners wrote that "racism and segregation in Ohio and Franklin County have also exacerbated a health divide resulting in Black residents having lower life expectancies than White residents; being far more likely than other races to die prematurely (before the age of 75); and to die of heart disease or stroke."

"Black residents also have higher levels of infant mortality, lower birth weights, are more likely to be overweight or obese, have adult diabetes, and have long-term complications from diabetes."

The coronavirus pandemic, the Board of Commissioners said, has exacerbated the health divide between white and black residents.

"A contemporary example of such disparity is highlighted by the coronavirus data in Franklin County that Black residents are hospitalized at twice the rate of other demographic groups ... and preliminary data in Ohio that suggest African Americans are dying at a disproportionately higher rate from the disease," the resolution states.

Though recent racial breakdowns of Ohio coronavirus data is not publicly available, many communities across the US have reported disproportionately higher cases of coronavirus among the black community, as well as higher death rates.

There are now more than 1.5 million confirmed cases of coronavirus across the US, and more than 93,000 deaths, [according to Johns Hopkins University data](#). As of Wednesday afternoon, Ohio had 29,436 confirmed cases, and 1,781 deaths.

### **Addressing 'injustices caused by racism'**

The announcement from county commissioners comes one week after the Franklin County Board of Health [issued the same declaration](#).

"Racism may be intentional or unintentional," Joe Mazzola, Franklin County Health Commissioner, [said in a statement](#). "We must address injustices caused by racism and we must support actions at all levels to ensure equal opportunity for all."

The Franklin County Board of Health committed to 17 actions, including creating "an equity and justice-oriented organization, by identifying specific activities, policies and procedures to embrace diversity and to incorporate antiracism principles."

County Commissioners said they will "always promote and support policies that prioritize the health of all people, especially people of color by mitigating exposure to adverse childhood experiences."

"Nothing is more important than the health and wellbeing of our residents," Board of Commissioners President John O'Grady said [in a statement](#). "Our community's success depends on all Franklin County residents being able to share in it, but right now we have a system that is resulting in different outcomes for people based on the color of their skin. That's not acceptable."

The Franklin County Board of Commissioners called on the state's governor, the Speaker of the Ohio House, and the Ohio Senate President to also declare racism as a public health crisis.

# Racism declared a public health crisis in Ohio's most populated county

*The disparities have been underscored from the coronavirus pandemic.*

By [Ella Torres, ABC News](#)

May 20, 2020, 12:50 PM

Officials in Ohio have declared racism a public health crisis in the state's most populated county.

Commissioners in Franklin County passed a [resolution](#) Tuesday that makes the declaration, as well as vows to support community efforts on racism and ensure that board commissioners will work under "antiracism principles."

The resolution was in the works well before the [novel coronavirus](#) crisis, according to officials.

"Racism has been a pandemic long before the current coronavirus pandemic," Commissioner Kevin L. Boyce said in a statement. "Our declaration today is important, but it's not saying anything that hasn't been apparent for a long time. COVID-19 has highlighted the health divide between black and white Ohioans, however, and I hope that it can be the catalyst we need to reform the whole health system so that it works for all of us equally."

The declaration describes race as a "social construct with no biological basis." It also identifies two types of racism: individualized racism and systemic racism.

Individualized racism is described as internal, while systemic racism is referred to as a system that gives opportunities and assigns a person's value based on how they look.

The commissioners said both types of racism, not race, have led to "persistent discrimination and disparate outcomes" between white people and people of color. Housing, education, employment and criminal justice were explicitly named as areas of life where discrimination is seen.

Racism has also been linked to worse health outcomes, according to the commissioners.

Black people have been infected with the novel coronavirus and are dying at a disproportionate rate across the country, according to an ABC News analysis of data from several states.

In Franklin County, white residents make up 67% of the [population](#) of 1.3 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Black residents make up 23%, yet it is black people who are hospitalized at twice the rate of other demographic groups and preliminary data in Ohio suggests they are dying at a disproportionately higher rate from the disease, according to the commissioners.

"Nothing is more important than the health and wellbeing of our residents," Board of Commissioners President John O'Grady said in a statement. "Our community's success depends on all Franklin County residents being able to share in it, but right now we have a system that is resulting in different outcomes for people based on the color of their skin. That's not acceptable."

The declaration by the commissioners, which was part of their 2019 Rise Together Blueprint for addressing poverty in Central Ohio, comes about a week after the Franklin County Board of Health [passed](#) a similar resolution.

"Racism may be intentional or unintentional," Joe Mazzola, the Franklin County health commissioner, said in a statement. "We must address injustices

caused by racism and we must support actions at all levels to ensure equal opportunity for all.”

The county's public health agency noted that racism and segregation in Ohio and Franklin County have "exacerbated a health divide resulting in Black Ohioans having lower life expectancies than White Ohioans."

Black residents are more likely than other races to die prematurely (before the age of 75), they have a nearly three times higher rate of infant mortality, and they are more likely to be overweight or obese and have adult onset diabetes, according to the Franklin County Board of Health.

“Hundreds of years of systemic racism, from slavery to segregation, redlining to Jim Crow, and discrimination in housing, finance, and education, some of which persists today, have led to predictable inequities,” Commissioner Marilyn Brown said in a statement. “We won’t solve these things overnight, but it’s important to start by recognizing them and beginning to work purposefully for change.”

# The Columbus Dispatch

By [Rita Price](#)

The Columbus Dispatch

Posted May 19, 2020 at 2:45 PM

Franklin County officials have formally recognized racism as a public health crisis, one that has led to disparities in everything from poverty and infant mortality to coronavirus infections. They want state leaders to take similar steps.

Saying it's time to step up both acknowledgment and action, Franklin County commissioners have **declared racism a public health crisis**.

They urged state leaders to follow.

"This resolution also calls on the governor, the speaker of the House and the president of the Senate to join us," Commissioner Kevin Boyce said Tuesday. "At some point, our leaders have to join us in this fight."

The declaration came just days after **Franklin County Public Health adopted a similar statement**, one in the works well before the coronavirus outbreak.

The commissioners' resolution calls the pandemic's disparate effect on African Americans locally and across Ohio "a contemporary example" of poor health outcomes arising from longstanding social inequities.

"We hear more and more that people are clamoring to return to normal," Joy Bivens, director of the county Department of Job and Family Services, said during the commissioners' meeting. "Our community can never return to normal. Normal was not working for them. Black people and people of color were in crisis before COVID hit our community."

Dr. Arthur James, a member of the county health board, told the commissioners that the declarations are part of a growing effort across the country to recognize imbalances rooted in racism and segregation, and that have persisted over generations.

The first Africans were brought to the United States 401 years ago, James said, and 86% of that history has been marked by either slavery or Jim Crow laws.

“The dominating narrative is that the disparities occur because of group-level flaws,” Arthur said. “This declaration acknowledges that this is not the case. The playing field has never been level.”

Commissioners formally embraced the need to address racial disparities as part of a poverty-fighting plan announced about a year ago. The latest declaration by the all-Democrat trio calls for more work to identify goals and to support training, policies and efforts aimed at reducing race-based inequities in health and well-being.

An emerging body of research, the resolution says, “demonstrates that racism itself is a social determinant of health.”

The document notes that African Americans in Franklin County experience “dramatically higher” rates of unemployment, poverty and incarceration. They also are less likely than whites to own homes and far more likely to live in neighborhoods with low-performing schools.

In the midst of the COVID-19 crisis, blacks in Franklin County also have been disproportionately represented in cases and hospitalizations. They already faced lower life expectancies, along with higher incidences of infant mortality and risks from heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

“We salute you for addressing the elephant in the room, which is racism,” said Nana Watson, president of the Columbus chapter of the NAACP.

Commissioners said the declaration must lead to change.

“We’ve pushed so that people are talking about race in this community,” Commissioner Marilyn Brown said. “But talking isn’t enough.”

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# The Columbus Dispatch

## *Opinion*

### **From the editor: With an apology, The Dispatch reinforces need to fight racism, sexism**

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By Alan Miller

The Columbus Dispatch

Posted May 20, 2020 at 4:40 PM Updated May 23, 2020 at 1:33 PM

It's clear that this news organization has important work to do. The Dispatch accepts the challenge — and invites others to join us — to be purposeful and powerful voices to eliminate racism and sexism wherever we find it in central Ohio and beyond.

We published an editorial on May 14 that was hurtful to members of the minority community and women business owners, and for that I sincerely apologize.

It doesn't matter that the message was not what the Editorial Board intended to say.

It was offensive. And with the clarity of hindsight and the help of gracious black community leaders and women business owners in a number of conversations in the past week, it is obvious that the words in that editorial were painfully insensitive and must be addressed.

The editorial, "City must take care in favoring minority contractors," commented on a plan by Mayor Andrew J. Ginther to seek equity for businesses owned by women and minorities as they compete for work with the city.

We should have known better than to use words we now see as dog whistles of racism or sexism. I am embarrassed that we didn't see the harm in that language before it was printed.

The regretful commentary was removed from our website soon after it was published. In the larger context, the awarding of city contracts is not as important as speaking out against injustice and bias that some citizens encounter on a daily basis for no other reason than the color of their skin or their gender.

In that recognition, it's clear that this news organization has important work to do. I told the community and business leaders that I accept their challenge on

behalf of The Dispatch — and invite others to join us — to be purposeful and powerful voices to eliminate racism and sexism wherever we find it, in central Ohio and beyond.

Leading the quest to eliminate gender bias is The Ohio Women’s Business Coalition, which works to remove barriers that women face in establishing and growing their businesses.

And leading the mission to end racial bias are the Franklin County Commissioners and Franklin County Public Health, both of which acted this month to declare racism a public health crisis. You will find editorial support for that effort on Sunday’s editorial page.

But government action to address racism and sexism can go only so far.

It is imperative for the rest of us to help fight those scourges so that each of us is better equipped to call them out when we see them and to stand up to those who practice them, knowingly or not.

My commitment is to be a better partner in the fight against racism and sexism by working to diversify our newsroom. I also commit to doing a better job of listening to and working with women’s groups and people in minority communities, which includes meeting regularly with leaders in those communities; increasing the diversity of our coverage; and working toward the overarching goal of rooting out racism and sexism.

We will do better. I look forward to writing again with updates on those efforts.

*Alan D. Miller is editor of The Dispatch.*

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# More than 20 Greater Cleveland organizations pledge to address racism as public health crisis

Updated Jun 04, 2020; Posted Jun 04, 2020

By [Julie Washington, cleveland.com](https://www.cleveland.com)

CLEVELAND, Ohio — Acknowledging that systemic racism affects everyone, more than 20 Greater Cleveland organizations have signed a declaration of racial equity and inclusion and pledged to address racism as a public health crisis.

Participating organizations include the [Cleveland Clinic](#), the Cleveland Foundation, Cuyahoga County Community College, [Destination Cleveland](#), Dix & Eaton, Downtown Cleveland Alliance, Gund Foundation, Inc., [Karamu House](#), NAACP Cleveland and Playhouse Square.

The pledge announced Thursday follows nearly a week of demonstrations and civil unrest in Northeast Ohio and around the world in support of George Floyd, a black man who was killed by a white police officer in Minneapolis.

“As leaders of institutions that all seek a better future for Cleveland as a whole, we are all fully committed to this charter and pledge our individual and collective resources to set forth tangible actions to undo structural racism,” the initiative said in a press release. “This is our commitment to our greater Cleveland community, and we ask that you join us as partners in this critical endeavor – and this day forward, let our actions speak louder than our words.”

A diverse coalition of organizations and institutions from across the region pledged to set forth tangible actions to undo the structural racism present in the community, the statement said. Organizations will pursue these actions individually and report their progress as a coalition in the future.

The statement of support reads as follows:

“This past weekend, across our country and here in Cleveland, we witnessed the ignition of long-smoldering injustice and inequity in our black and brown communities, the evidence of which is undeniable yet frequently overlooked: The rate of COVID-19 infections and infant mortality, disproportionate unemployment and another murder of an unarmed black citizen – George Floyd – at the hands of a police officer.

“Systemic racism is everyone’s problem. In Cleveland’s continuing fight for racial equity and inclusion, we have a singular history and have played a progressive role on a national stage. Prominent African American leaders throughout Cleveland’s history and today, have been instrumental in pushing us into the forefront. What we have learned over time is that this is not a fight of one race but rather a fight of one community – our Cleveland community.

“Standing united, we are today voicing our strong support of recent legislation passed by Cleveland City Council to declare racism a public health crisis. Still, this is not enough.

“Rectifying a system of structural racism will take much more than words. Work has been done, and, while incremental change is apparent, we need to do much more – and we need to do it now. We must act, stand with justice and work together across our community to do our part to both heal and begin to undo the endemic racism that has and continues to disproportionately hurt our city – emotionally, physically and in terms of reputation.

“This legislation can enable and empower us to take this issue head on. It can provide a platform rooted in policy that can initiate substantive care and sustainable change, beginning at a governmental level and then cascading throughout our community.

“What we do now to collectively hear the voices of pain, loss, and fear can initiate the actions we take to heal, change and unite our city to define us for years to come.”

The statement of support was signed by:

Birthing Beautiful Communities, The Cleveland Clinic, The Cleveland Foundation, Cuyahoga County Community College, Destination Cleveland, Dix & Eaton, Downtown Cleveland Alliance, Fairfax Renaissance Development Corporation, First Year Cleveland, The Greater Cleveland Partnership, Gund Foundation, Historic Gateway Neighborhood Corporation, Historic Warehouse District Development Corporation, JumpStart Inc., Karamu House, NAACP Cleveland, Playhouse Square, The Presidents’ Council, The United Way of Greater Cleveland, Urban League of Greater Cleveland, YMCA of Greater Cleveland and YWCA of Greater Cleveland.

Additional organizations are welcome to join the initiative by contacting Jason Guyer of the Greater Cleveland Partnership, [jguyer@gcpartnership.com](mailto:jguyer@gcpartnership.com).

# Hamilton County to vote soon to declare racism a public health crisis

[Scott Wartman](#), Cincinnati Enquirer Published 11:46 a.m. ET June 3, 2020 | Updated 4:18 p.m. ET June 3, 2020

Black people in the United States face two pandemics, Hamilton County Commissioner Victoria Parks said Wednesday.

The coronavirus and racism.

The coronavirus has infected a disproportionate number of black people, studies have shown. And the recent deaths of George Floyd, Ahmed Arbery and Breonna Taylor have brought issues of racism faced by black people to the forefront.

"Both are extremely deadly," Parks said. "In order to help heal our society, we must identify and treat the pandemic of racism. We must address structural racism with the same effort and passion we use toward other policy priorities."

Parks said within a month, the three Hamilton County Board of Commissioners will vote to declare racism a public health crisis.

Hamilton County isn't the first government body in Ohio to consider this. Columbus City Council declared racism a public health crisis Monday night, and the Franklin County Board of Health did so last month, saying "COVID-19 has highlighted the effects of the health divide between black and white Ohioans."

Democratic lawmakers have also called for the General Assembly to pass a resolution declaring racism a public health crisis.

What such a declaration in Hamilton County would do remains to be determined. Parks said commissioners will work on that in the next month.

"I could sit down and write a resolution, but I want meat on the bones," Parks said "I want to be able to declare not just the problem, not that it's just a crisis. I also want to know the steps Hamilton County will take to address it."

The resolutions introduced in the Ohio General Assembly, which would be nonbinding, ask the governor, state agencies and state lawmakers to do 16 things. For example, they ask Republican Gov. Mike DeWine to establish a working group to promote racial equality.