



February 6, 2022

The Honorable Sherrod Brown
Hart Senate Office Building
120 Constitution Ave, NE
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Cory Booker
Hart Senate Office Building
120 Constitution Ave, NE
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Alex Padilla
Hart Senate Office Building
120 Constitution Ave, NE
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Brown, Chief Deputy Whip Booker, and Senator Padilla,

On behalf of the [Big Cities Health Coalition \(BCHC\)](#), I am writing to thank you for introducing a resolution to declare racism a public health crisis at the close of the 117th Congress. Your declaration is an important and powerful first step in recognizing the deeply rooted racial inequities that exist in our country. Every American deserves to live a healthy and prosperous life, regardless of their race or ethnicity. At BCHC, we strive to break down structural barriers to achieving health and equity in our communities, and, as such, we commend you for your commitment to tackling this complex and longstanding challenge.

BCHC is comprised of health officials who lead 35 of the nation's largest metropolitan health departments, who together serve more than 61 million – or about one in five – Americans. Most of our member jurisdictions have issued declarations that racism is a public health issue. These declarations are critical for raising awareness; however, the real impact lies in taking action to address and overcome this immense challenge.

To support our members in their antiracist work to promote community health equitably, we have taken the following actions:

- Responding to the stark disparities in disease burden and deaths early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, along with protests for racial justice in the summer of 2020, BCHC worked with members and our long standing partner, [Prevention Institute](#), to produce [Centering Racial Justice to Strengthen the Public Health Ecosystem: Lessons from COVID-19](#), a policy brief offering a transformative model to ensure that each of us, regardless of our race/ethnicity, or where we live, work, or play can live our healthiest life. We encourage you to review this policy brief, as it outlines a critically important framework through which we can equitably rebuild the public's health in communities across the country. The brief puts forth policy recommendations for and by governmental public health and community-based organizations drawn from key collaborative lessons learned in the early days of the COVID response.

- In June 2022, BCHC released on [Urban Health Agenda](#), a shared, actionable vision to transform urban health. Every aspect of our lives affects our health. To be healthy, we need reliable access to income, housing, fresh foods, transportation, education, and more. Elected officials and policymakers, particularly at the local level, make choices every day that affect the health and well-being of communities. These choices can either help or harm, promote safe and healthy habits or discourage them, ensure access to resources for health for all or just for a privileged few, and inspire with creative design or extend historical oppression and marginalization. The Urban Health Agenda envisions all government agencies working together with their community partners to dismantle structural inequities and systems built on generations of racism to promote health, well-being, safety, and longevity.
- Through a joint project also with Prevention Institute, called *Advancing Racial Justice for Health*, BCHC looked at declarations, subsequent activities, and equity infrastructure in 16 BCHC jurisdictions using publicly available online sources and conducted interviews with several public health leaders and community partners. A quote from one senior health official summarizes the level of commitment that was abundant in our findings: “We don’t want this to be performative declaration. We want community to hold us accountable and say we need to be doing more for our community and that’s what public health should be doing.” Through this project and others, such as the 2021 Public Health Workforce Interest and Needs Survey ([PH WINS](#)), we uncovered the tremendous need for support, funding, and workforce capacity to launch, continue, and/or scale efforts in big cities and move to true policy and systems change.

The 118th Congress presents an opportunity for lawmakers to take bold action to combat racism. Once again, BCHC lauds you for shining light on this important issue, and we seek to work with you to continue the journey into action. We would be happy to meet to discuss how BCHC could further support this legislation. Please do not hesitate to contact me at juliano@bigcitieshealth.org for additional information.

Sincerely,



Chrissie Juliano, MPP
Executive Director