Team Pledges to Address Racism in Kenosha

The Challenge: Among Wisconsin counties, Kenosha has some of the highest racial disparities in infant mortality rates between African-Americans and whites. These poor health outcomes are the result of deeply rooted community and societal attitudes and practices. A growing body of evidence on Lifecourse Theory has linked these embedded social norms to chronic and toxic stress, which results in disproportionate poor health and well-being outcomes among racial minorities. There are few successful examples of efforts taken by communities to unpack and understand how racism is nested in systems and structures and even fewer examples of how communities acquired skills to implement projects that result in eliminating racial disparities.

Project Goal: The Dismantling Racism project sought to bring together a team of stakeholders in Kenosha from a range of sectors (health, criminal justice, schools, social services, etc.) and partner with a UW faculty member to more deeply understand the subject of racism. Project goals included: increase the team’s knowledge about racism; conduct a literature review on effective approaches for dismantling racism; gather community input including the development of a report outlining action steps; and build broad community support for moving action forward on priorities identified in the report.

Results: The Dismantling Racism team, which started with just five people, has expanded to 18 members, with representatives from a wide range of city and county entities. Existing groups exploring the issue of racism joined the Dismantling Racism team to help streamline efforts, ultimately increasing the community’s collective capacity to address racial disparities under a single entity.

Findings from a survey of project participants indicate respondents self-reported that the project helped them understand racism, the link between race and health outcomes, how racism relates to their work, why equity matters and their own biases and behavior. The team’s next step is to pursue training opportunities on how to have courageous conversations and identify which priorities in the community report to carry forward.

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