



## OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE


Marc Elrich  
County Executive

Tiffany Ward  
Director and Chief Equity Officer

### MEMORANDUM

April 11, 2023

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director  
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director  
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-80  
Local Health Department Health Disparities Grant (\$489,572)

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriations #23-80 Local Health Department Health Disparities Grant advances racial equity and social justice in Montgomery County by focusing resources on COVID-19 prevention and broader health-related racial and ethnic disparities that decrease the risk of COVID-19 and associated outcomes. The supplemental appropriation also works to enhance the community dental health worker program and remove transportation barriers to accessing medical care for BIPOC populations and rural communities.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of SA #23-80 is to address the impact of COVID-19 related racial and ethnic disparities on chronic disease prevention and disease management, and associated Social Determinants of Health (SDoH). The grant will be administered by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Public Health Services (PHS) area. The PHS function is to protect and promote the health and safety of County residents. Some of the programs include monitoring health status and implementing intervention strategies to contain or prevent disease; fostering public-private partnerships, to increase access to health services; developing and implementing programs and strategies to address health needs; and providing individual and community-level health education<sup>1</sup>. The SA will specifically fund the following activities:

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<sup>1</sup> Public Health Services Operating Budget. Available at:

<https://apps.montgomerycountymd.gov/BASISOPERATING/Common/Department.aspx?ID=PHS>

- 1) Hire one full-time Human Services Specialist position and a consultant to design and implement a Health Equity Plan to address COVID-19 health disparities in County racial and ethnic minority populations experiencing or at risk of chronic disease;
- 2) Hire one part-time Human Services Specialist contractor to lead efforts to form a workgroup to plan, build, and implement cross-sectional partnerships to develop recommendations to address transportation barriers for ethnic minority populations and rural communities; and
- 3) Hire one full-time Community Health Worker position to work with local county dental offices and their patients to address the impact of COVID-19 related racial and ethnic disparities on chronic disease.

### III. **ANALYSIS:**

ORESJ has examined the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on BIPOC and low-income residents from topics ranging from housing, transportation, vaccination, personal protective equipment and disinfection, and more<sup>2</sup>. While related to COVID-19 prevention, this supplemental has broader implications that would also address disparities that are exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic as well as chronic disease prevention and disease management, and associated SDoH, specifically transportation barriers.

Healthy Montgomery is Montgomery County's community health improvement process. It is an ongoing effort that brings together County government agencies, County hospital systems, minority health programs/initiatives, advocacy groups, academic institutions, community-based service providers and other stakeholders to achieve optimal health and well-being for all Montgomery County residents. Healthy Montgomery's goals are: 1) Improve access to health and social services; 2) Achieve health equity for all residents; and 3) Enhance the physical and social environment to support optimal health and well-being<sup>3</sup>.

According to data from the Health Department's Health Equity in Montgomery County, Maryland: Healthy Montgomery Core Indicators, 2010-2018 reports show inequities exist between racial and ethnic minorities compared to Whites in chronic disease. The following table displays the rate difference and rate ratio (RR) comparing chronic disease for minority populations to the Non-Hispanic White population as a reference for each indicator. This data indicates the disproportionate and stark disparities in health outcomes, specifically for Black and Hispanic or Latino residents.

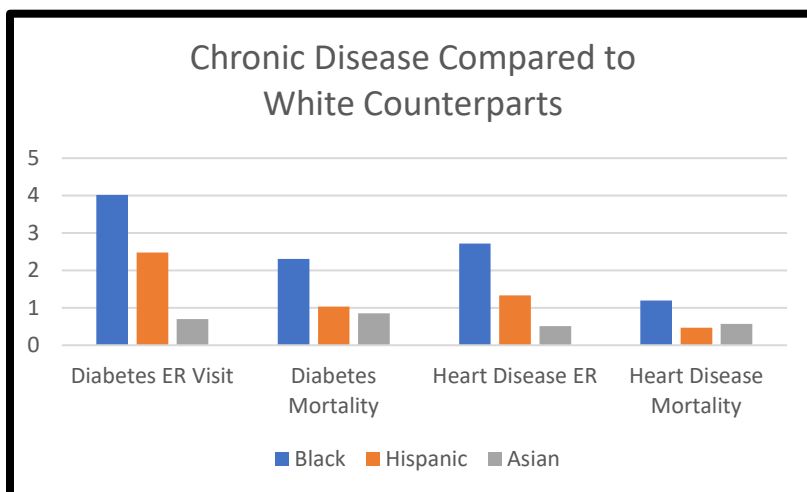
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<sup>2</sup> Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice. Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statements. Available at:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/appr.html>

<sup>3</sup> Healthy Montgomery. About Us. Available at:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/healthymontgomery/overview.html>



**Data source:** Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services. Health Equity in Montgomery County, Maryland: Healthy Montgomery Core Indicators, 2010-2018. 2021.

In order to address disparities such as those illustrated above, as well as disparities exacerbated by COVID, the County will direct resources toward the creation of a Health Equity Plan (HEP). PHS will partner with the African America Health Program, the Latino Health Initiative, and the Asian American Health Initiative to address the impact of COVID-19 disparities. In addition to the creation of a 10-year HEP, the grant will help establish a Health Equity Taskforce. The HEP will be community driven, with cross-sectoral stakeholder collaboration. The HEP will also lay the groundwork for the Health in All Policies<sup>4</sup> (HiAP) analytic framework<sup>5</sup>.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, SDoH are the nonmedical factors that influence health outcomes, including the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life<sup>6</sup>. The influence of SDoH on an individual's health, well-being, and quality of life can contribute to wide health disparities and inequities<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>4</sup> World Health Organization defined Health in All Policies as an approach to public policies across sectors that systematically takes into account the health and health systems implications of decisions, seeks synergies and avoids harmful health impacts, in order to improve population health and health equity.

<sup>5</sup> As part of the 2016 Community Health Needs Assessment, community members identified several characteristics of a healthy community, which most often, did not focus on health care and treatment but on the underlying Social Determinants of Health. In response, the Healthy Montgomery Steering Committee decided to establish and sustain a Health in All Policies (HiAP) model to improve the underlying factors of health. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/healthymontgomery/programs/health-policies.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control. Social Determinants of Health at CDC. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/about/sdoh/index.html>

<sup>7</sup> US Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2030. Available at: <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health>.

Access to reliable and convenient transportation is needed to ensure consistent access to health care-reducing the potential for negative health outcomes. A pre-COVID study showed each year 3.6 million people in the US do not obtain medical care due to transportation issues stemming from lack of vehicle access, inadequate infrastructure, long distances and lengthy times to reach needed services, transportation costs, and adverse policies that affect travel<sup>8</sup>. The study also stated that transportation is interrelated with other SDoH such as poverty, social isolation, access to education, and racial discrimination. Studies indicate that BIPOC populations who had an increased risk for severe illness from COVID-19 were more likely to lack transportation to health care services<sup>9</sup>.

Access to quality transportation services is needed for BIPOC populations, as well as rural communities to reduce disparities in health indicators. ORESJ has written about COVID and transportation disparities for BIPOC populations in REIA #22-9 COVID-19 Department of Transportation Research Demonstration. The full analysis is available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-9.pdf>.

The Health Disparities grant will fund a contractor and create a Transportation Barriers Workgroup to plan, build, and implement cross-sectoral partnerships to align public health, healthcare, and non-health interventions to address transportation barriers to medical appointments and personal activities of daily living for racial and ethnic minority populations and rural communities.

Community health workers (CHW)<sup>10</sup> and Promotores de Salud play a role in helping individuals navigate accessing providers and services, understanding their benefits, and overcoming language, transportation, cultural, and financial barriers. The MD Department of Health, which certifies the County's CHW lists a core set of competencies for Community Health Workers, which includes the following.

- Advocacy and community capacity building skills
- Effective oral and written communication skills
- Cultural competency
- Understanding of ethics and confidentiality issues
- Knowledge of local resources and system navigation
- Care coordination support skills

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<sup>8</sup> Health Research & Educational Trust. (2017, November). Social determinants of health series: Transportation and the role of hospitals. Chicago, IL: Health Research & Educational Trust. Available at: <http://www.hpoe.org/Reports-HPOE/2017/sdoh-transportation-role-of-hospitals.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> US Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2030. Access to Health Services. Available at: <https://health.gov/healthypeople/priority-areas/social-determinants-health/literature-summaries/access-health-services>

<sup>10</sup> Maryland Department of Health define a community health worker as a frontline public health worker who is a trusted member of or has an unusually close understanding of the community served.

- Teaching skills to promote health behavior change
- Outreach methods and strategies
- Understanding of public health concepts and health literacy

The Health Disparities Grant award will provide funding to build and expand the community health worker network by recruiting, training, and deploying CHWs to work with local county dental offices and their patients to address the impact of COVID-19 related racial and ethnic disparities on chronic disease prevention and disease management, and associated SDoH. According to the Centers for Disease Control, about 3 in 4 Hispanics and non-Hispanic Black adults have an unmet need for dental treatment, as do people with lower incomes<sup>11</sup>. The CDC also reported that populations disproportionately affected by COVID-19 are also at higher risk for oral diseases and experience oral health and oral health care disparities at higher rates<sup>12</sup>. There is a correlation between poor oral health and chronic disease, such as heart disease, diabetes, and brain degeneration<sup>13</sup>. Community health workers, specifically community dental health coordinators, can help people navigate barriers such as poverty, language, geography, and even transportation to access the dental care needed to treat and prevent oral health issues.

As the County moves towards the end of the pandemic, many COVID-19 relief programs and initiatives have already come to an end or are in the process of winding down—especially considering the end of the Federal Public Health Emergency (PEH) in May 2023. This raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of efforts to address the health disparities that have been highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic. Continued investment in these types of programs and initiatives will be critical in ensuring that progress towards health equity is not lost once the PEH ends, as well as when the grant period ends. The Health Disparities grant is an important and necessary component in County efforts in COVID-19 prevention. The creation of the Health Equity Plan, Transportation Barriers Workgroup, and expansion of the Community Health Worker program will bolster efforts to dismantle systemic racism and its effects on health outcomes for communities of color.

cc: Raymond L. Crowel, Psy.D., Director, Department of Health and Human Service  
Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive

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<sup>11</sup> Centers for Disease Control. Facts About Adult Oral Health. Available at:

<https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/basics/adult-oral-health/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> Brian Z, Weintraub JA. Oral Health and COVID-19: Increasing the Need for Prevention and Access. 2020. Available at:

[https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2020/20\\_0266.htm](https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2020/20_0266.htm).

<sup>13</sup> Cuvelier, M. Oral Health Disparities: What CHWs Can Do. Available at: <https://chwtraining.org/chws-can-improve-oral-health-disparities/>.