

November XX, 2020

Director Richard Whitley
Nevada Department of Health and Human Services
4126 Technology Way, Suite 100
Carson City, NV 89706

Dear Director Whitley,

Thank you for all of your efforts to increase access to care and improve health outcomes for minority communities across the State. The Advisory Committee for the Nevada Office of Minority and Equity (NOMHE) is committed to supporting NOMHE and the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in achieving optimal levels of health and wellness for racial and ethnic minorities in the State and is proud to support your continued work on this topic.

Currently, more than half of Nevada's residents are racially and ethnically diverse and are most at risk of negative health outcomes due to systemic racism. The inequities seen within the State's existing systems have disproportionately impacted communities of color, resulting in significant disparities in virtually every aspect of public life.

Whether it be the unequal treatment of people navigating the criminal justice system, the lack access to quality health care, or opportunities resulting from disparities in public education; certain communities have continued to be left behind in our State. This has resulted in minority communities being more at-risk for food and housing insecurity, unemployment, and decreased economic mobility.

While Governor Sisolak's proclamation declaring racism a public health crisis is an important first step to creating a more just and equitable environment for all Nevadans, it is important that we bring forth concrete policy actions to combat racism head-on and improve outcomes for minority communities who are struggling.

If the State of Nevada is going to adequately address the social determinants of health that have been impacted by structural and institutional racism, leaders are going to need to hear directly from people in the communities they serve and act quickly. To help accomplish this goal, the Advisory Committee for the NOMHE is proposing the following policy recommendation be considered for implementation by the Nevada DHHS and the Governor's Office.

1) Work to expand data pool utilized by DHHS through collaboration between NOMHE and the Office of Analytics within the Nevada Department of Health and Human Services to improve health outcomes among minority communities.

Historically, the State has struggled to collect robust levels of data specific to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and disability status of residents. This lack of available data has posed challenges in delivering services to marginalized communities. These challenges have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately impacts communities of color who are already more at-risk for negative health outcomes. A crucial first step in combatting racism in Nevada involves developing a more in depth understanding of the State's minority communities and using a data-driven approach to address systemic inequities.

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To better understand gaps in access to care and delivery of services, the NOMHE should work more collaboratively with the Office of Analytics to expand the data pool used by DHHS to improve health outcomes in marginalized communities. This more refined data pool should incorporate sources such as the CDC's Vulnerability Index, the National Equity Atlas, and other relevant data sources used by local non-profit partners and be reflected in tools such as the Nevada Minority Health Report.

Once more robust data is able to be collected and analyzed, the DHHS can work to develop a targeted action plan driven by equity-focused goals for addressing health disparities in these communities.

2) Increase the role and footprint of the NOMHE to serve as a facilitator and convenor for Nevada's minority communities and the organizations who serve them.

Too often, many people in minority communities and the non-profit organizations who serve them, struggle to gain access to critical resources that are available from the State. Even though many valuable services and programs are offered throughout the State, the vast majority of people within marginalized populations simply do not know about them.

In order to foster better engagement and trust within the community there is a need for a State office to step up and convene Nevada's minority communities. The NOMHE should establish itself as facilitator who can connect organizations to available resources and bring the right people to the table when the State is looking to make policy decisions that affect these communities.

The NOMHE should also work to serve as a repository of information. Programs operating at the State level to impact social determinants of health in service to marginalized communities should take proactive steps to ensure NOMHE is aware of their latest resources to ensure equal access and streamlined delivery on behalf of all communities.

3) Work collaboratively with the Nevada Legislature to support the passage of legislation that would designate Chief Diversity Officers at State agencies.

Currently there is not a cohesive strategy for State agencies to ensure they are meeting the needs of Nevada's minority populations. In building off of the success of AB264 from the 80th legislative session, which established Tribal liaisons in State agencies, there is an opportunity to expand this concept to better serve all minority communities.

Pending legislation for the upcoming legislative session would allow for agencies to designate individual(s), who would be responsible working to increase the agency's responsiveness to minority populations. This would allow agencies to work collaboratively with one another to address disparities that may exist in service delivery for people with diverse backgrounds.

The Office of New Americans, the Commission for Minority Affairs, and the Governor's Office of Economic Development have been involved in preliminary conversations about this concept. We would recommend that the DHHS and other agencies start joining these discussions with stakeholders and members of the community.

4) Convene an advisory council of diversity-focused agency leaders to meet and collaborate on an ongoing basis.

To ensure that Governor Sisolak's proclamation can have immediate and lasting impacts on minority communities, an advisory working group should be convened to develop a coordinated strategy for working to address systemic racism in the State. This working group could include NOMHE, cabinet heads, members of the Governor's staff, and various agency leaders who are working to improve outcomes in marginalized communities.

It is important that this advisory council meet at least twice and year in an ongoing fashion to ensure that agencies are continually working to meet the needs of minority communities. These meetings can provide an opportunity for various agencies to collaborate, identify strategies to engage different communities, and work in a unified fashion to improve outcomes. The outcomes of the meetings should be timed to provide insight to the Governor as they craft the annual State of the State address and to NOMHE as it crafts equity focused goals in support of DHHS master action planning.

NOMHE's collaborative working relationship with the Office of Analytics will be crucial to the success of these meetings, since various agencies will need access to reliable data to develop meaningful and actionable goals to improve outcomes for minority communities.

5) Work to increase the resources available to the NOMHE through federal funding to best serve Nevada's minority communities.

In order to ensure that the NOMHE can accomplish these things and best serve Nevada's minority communities, the Office will require an adequate level of resources. While there are a number of budgetary constraints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a tremendous opportunity to work towards identifying more opportunities for federal funding to support these efforts. Through additional federal grant opportunities, funding can put directly into programs and communities where it can do the most good.

Under the Governor's leadership and direction, the DHHS and the Grants Office can work to pursue specific grant opportunities that could utilize the State's network of non-profit organizations to enhance service delivery in communities who need the most help.

Thank you to both yourself and Governor Sisolak for your continued efforts to increase both outcomes and opportunities for all Nevadans, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation or socioeconomic status. We look forward to working collaboratively with you to address the effects that systemic racism has had on Nevada residents, as we work towards for solutions for positive change.

Sincerely,

The Advisory Committee for the Nevada Office of Minority Health and Equity

cc: Michelle White, Office of the Governor
Scott Gilles, Office of the Governor

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