COVID-19 EXPOSES HEALTH DISPARITIES

A compelling quote from an unknown author has become emblematic about the COVID-19 pandemic and the inequities it has revealed: “We are all in the same storm, but we are not in the same boat.” What this storm clearly reveals is that intersection of poverty and health disparities. COVID-19 has had a profound impact on nearly every person’s daily life. Yet the burden of the pandemic is not equally shared.

The illustration of COVID-19 as a storm which we are collectively weathering is apt. People with more resources are at an advantage over those without. We already had the data to reinforce that differing levels of privilege exist in our community. Now, with COVID-19, you can clearly see how this disaster is affecting people in more devastating ways that could have been predicted.

FERRY BOAT
Economically Advantaged

- Can work from home
- Can consider taking up new hobbies
- Easily social distance
- Reliable Wi-Fi and technology for their household
- Access to quality healthcare

ROWBOAT
Working Poor

- Essential workers
- Struggle with adequate childcare
- Underlying health conditions

IN THE WATER
Homeless Community

- Cannot practice social distancing
- No economic relief
- Limited access to water and hygiene

Long before the strike of COVID-19, economic inequities were further impacted by race. Disproportionally, black and brown individuals are weathering the COVID-19 storm in a rowboat or trying to stay afloat in the water. This pandemic did not create these inequities. Instead, its magnifying and worsening the grim reality that already existed.
COVID-19 does not discriminate in terms of race or socioeconomic status. However, this virus revealed the effects of structural racism on people of color who have historically been oppressed and live in disinvested communities. These communities typically lack jobs with living wages, transportation, hospitals, urgent care clinics, green spaces, recreation and nutritious food options all of which further produce health disparities.

Community disinvestment creates inequities in income, health and access to resources. The health outcomes that manifest in these communities result in a higher rate of preexisting conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure. All of which have created worse health outcomes for those who are infected by the COVID-19 virus.

**THIS IS A NATIONAL ISSUE**

The racial inequalities related to COVID-19 are not just impacting Cleveland. Unfortunately, this is a national issue.

- In Michigan, a state that is 14 percent black, 40 percent of the people who have died of COVID-19 have been black. (Cleveland.com, April 11, 2020)

- Illinois is 15 percent black, and black people make up 42 percent of the people who have died from complications of the disease. (Cleveland.com, April 11, 2020)

- Thirty-nine percent of cases in Cuyahoga county have been in persons who identify as Black, while only about 30 percent of the population overall identifies as Black. (Center for Community Solutions)

- For comparison, Cuyahoga County’s demographic breakdown consists of a 64% white population and 31% African American population, according to census data.

**UNITED WAY’S RESPONSE**

United Way of Greater Cleveland Public Policy Agenda focuses on reducing health disparities and confronting systemic racism as one of the root causes of poverty. Earlier this year, Augie Napoli CEO of United Way testified in hearings before the Cleveland City Council to declare racism as a public health issue. The recent events of COVID-19 have only highlighted and exacerbated existing economic and health inequities in Greater Cleveland. United Way will continue to advocate and support various initiatives, such as access to COVID-19 testing in underserved neighbors, to provide a lifeline to our communities facing a storm.