

City
of
Milwaukee

Tom Barrett
Mayor

Jeanette Kowalik, PHD, MPH, MCHES
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May 16, 2019

City of Milwaukee Common Council
200 E. Wells Street, Room 205
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear President Hamilton, Chairman Donovan, and Honorable Members of the Public Safety and Health Committee,

I was excited to see Council Resolution [190098](#) which commits the City of Milwaukee to take actions towards achieving racial equality. As the resolution highlights, racism is a public health issue.

The City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) has taken steps over the past several years to begin to dismantle racism and implement strategies to reduce the impact racism has on our health. We remain committed to this work and wanted to provide a brief summary of a few of the key initiatives we've invested in:

Development of MKE Elevate: In 2017, the MHD published [MKE Elevate](#), a community-driven plan to elevate the health of our city. Through an intensive planning process, the community said that in order to have safe and healthy neighborhoods, we need to have an inclusive and fair society. Specifically, partners identified and committed to strategies to promote equitable laws and practices, enhance community connectedness, and strengthen and enhance neighborhood and civic engagement.

Participation in the Government Alliance for Racial Equity: The MHD a new member of the Government Alliance for Race and Equity (GARE) and developing goals and strategies, with an explicit focus on race, to improve the overall health of Milwaukee. MHD is working to eliminate health disparities amongst communities of color and other traditionally marginalized groups by addressing race and equity within all department policies and procedures and ensuring that we have a culturally competent and representative workforce to serve Milwaukee residents. The MHD's participation in GARE connects the department to a network of agencies across the nation and other tools and resources to reduce the health disparities in Milwaukee. We are eager to begin this work and trust the process will lead to the department's ability to better serve the community. The

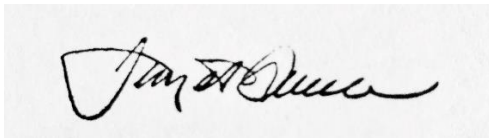
MHD's GARE team is working closely with the city-wide team led by the Department of City Development to maximize impact.

Launch of Birth Outcomes Made Better Program: The MHD has a long history of developing programs to reduce the black-white infant mortality disparity in Milwaukee and improve maternal health outcomes. This summer we're launching a new program, Birth Outcomes Made Better (BOMB), which will increase access to doulas. Doulas provide physical, emotional, and educational support to women during and after pregnancy. Nationally, there has been a trend to increase access to doulas to better meet the needs of women, specifically Black women. Doulas are one of many resources that can be used to decrease adverse health outcomes for moms and babies (maternal morbidity and mortality, and infant mortality).

Making health equity explicit through the reorganization: Through our reorganization, we're adding a Public Health Strategist who will implement MKE Elevate and, more broadly, work to advance health equity in our city. While some organizations add health equity as a program or division, we are committed to infusing equity into every fiber of our organization- from policy and procedures, hiring, creating safe spaces, and honoring our culture in how we serve the public.

The MHD's vision is for Milwaukeeans to live their best life and we know that we won't realize our vision until we dismantle racism and address the current and historical impact of racism on our community.

I look forward to engaging with you in this work,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Jeanette Kowalik".

Jeanette Kowalik, PhD, MPH, MCHES
Commissioner of Health