

SEPTEMBER 2020

### Introduction

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been anything but business as usual. We are reminded that the goal and legislative mandate of the UConn Health Disparities Institute (HDI) to advance health equity and reduce health disparities in Connecticut is more important now than ever, as our nation wrestles with the dual pandemics of novel COVID-19 and pre-existing structural racism.

Our team at UConn HDI has gone to extraordinary lengths to serve our institution and our communities during these times of grieving, pain, loss, and uncertainty. We have focused on supporting organizations, working on policy and systems change, providing technical assistance and capacity-building supports to the public, and engaging legislative leaders. The COVID-19 response activities we enacted and collaborated with stakeholders build on our strategic

#### Our Vision

Everyone in Connecticut will have an opportunity to enjoy good health and well-being.

#### Our Mission

To reduce disparities by turning ideas shown to work into policies and actions.

approaches and goal to advance health equity and reduce health disparities in the state of CT. Although these are challenging times, our team is heartened by the work we do together and we have risen to the call to take forward moving action in the face of the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism. We know we will weather the storm as we have weathered our nation's crises throughout history: in community with one another. In the following report, we outline our COVID-19 response activities guided by our four strategic approaches to eliminating health disparities and advancing health equity:

- Support policy action and systems change.
- Change data-driven and public narratives about vulnerable populations.
- Deepen community engagement and cultivate cross-sector collaborations.
- Enhance health equity research, training, and innovation.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	
Overall Impact	3
Health Equity Week Campaign	
COVID-19 Data Mapping	5
Collaborations and Community Engagement	
Educational Mission	
Articles, Presentations, & Media	
Op-Eds and Articles	8
Presentations/Webinars	8
Modia Interviews	9

### Overall Impact

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S., HDI has been working tirelessly to respond to the dual pandemics of COVID-19 and racism, with calls to embed equity in our emergency response.

Through our COVID-19 response efforts, HDI has gained greater statewide and national visibility, which has resulted in HDI leadership being called to serve in the following ways:

- Invited to Congressional strategy sessions to offer insights about policy levers to advance health equity, particularly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Invited by Mayor Luke Bronin to lead the Public Health Working Group for the City of Hartford's COVID-19 Recovery Task Force and make recommendations for Hartford's reopening process.
- Interviewed as a public health and racial equity expert for over 21 media pieces.
- Requested to speak as a subject matter expert on policy and systems change, health equity, and racism at statewide and national forums, including but not limited to the:
  - CT Black and Puerto Rican Caucus
  - CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services
  - Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity
  - Ministerial Health Fellowship
  - CT Maternal and Infant Mortality Work Group on Maternity, Postpartum & Well-baby Care
  - American Psychological Association

 Engaged by two foundations - Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and UConn Foundation - to speak with stakeholders regarding racial/ethnic disparities in COVID-19 and solutions to advance health equity.



- Published seven op-eds and articles, including two in partnership with Health Equity Solutions, on COVID-19, health equity, and racism.
- Served as a subject matter expert to support the offices of Senators Chris Murphy and Chris Van Hollen in the introduction of federal legislation to reform medical debt and strengthen consumer protections (S.4697). This follows the introduction of the COVID-19 Medical Debt Collection Relief Act of 2020 (S.4350) in July, a bill that would prevent health care providers from taking drastic steps to collect medical debt from COVID-19 positive patients.

Across our COVID-19 response, our reach continues to grow and includes over:

- 45K viewers/participants in community conversations/presentations
- 265K engagements on social media
- 73 partners across and beyond UConn
- 21 media interviews
- 147.9 million potential readers of op-ed and news articles
- 16 presentations/webinars

# Health Equity Week Campaign

For the second year, we launched Health Equity Week in partnership with Health Equity Solutions. We rapidly shifted our campaign in early April to a virtual platform, given COVID-related closures. Coming at the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Health Equity Week campaign was a jump start to building statewide momentum around addressing racial disparities and centering health equity in Connecticut's COVID-19 pandemic response.

Our call to action was for the consistent collection and public reporting of race, ethnicity, and language data for COVID-19 testing, cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. We also recommended that standardized data collection be required across health, basic needs, and economic supports, such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and unemployment.

In partnership with
Health Equity Solutions,
we published two op-eds,
deployed a social media
campaign with original
content, and shared a social
media toolkit in English and Spanish.

Approach:
POLICY ACTION
& SYSTEMS
CHANGE

Dr. Wizdom Powell gave the keynote address at the Ministerial Health Fellowship Town Hall on COVID-19, health disparities, and policy and systems solutions. Over 145 stakeholders attended the town hall, including at least **seven state legislators**. We conducted follow-up with each legislator, including representatives from the Black and Puerto Rican Caucus.



See our webpage for our Health
Equity Week 2020 Call to Action and
resources page.

# HEALTH EQUITY WEEK 2020! APRIL 5 - 11, 2020

A SOCIAL MULTIMEDIA EXPERIENCE #HEALTHEQUITYWEEK



## Covid-19 Data Mapping

We leveraged our data analytics expertise and the PolicyMap tool to track COVID-19 health disparities in CT.

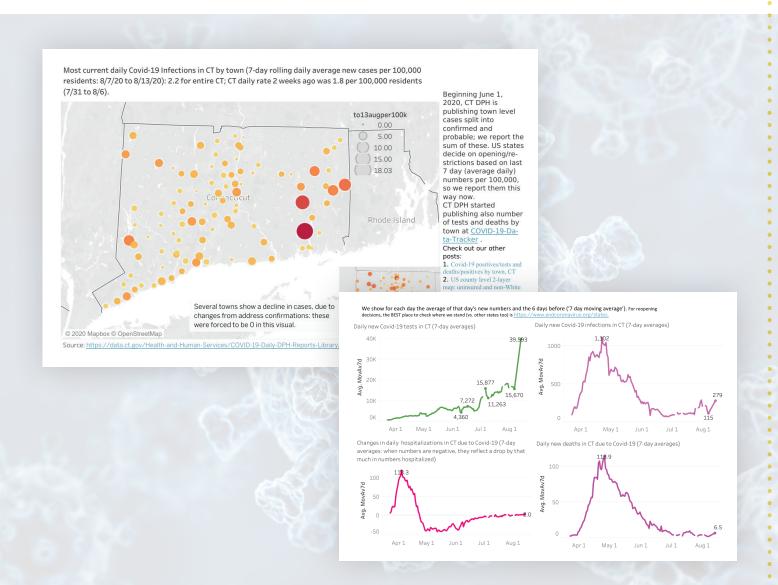
We are working with the CT Department of Health to provide accessible, up-to-date data by race/ethnicity, gender, and age to draw focused attention to disparate infection rates, number of tests, and mortality rates. Specifically, we created a dashboard that reports death rates per 100,000

residents by gender and race/ethnicity; COVID-19 infections in CT per 10,000 residents by town, and daily changes in COVID-19 tests in CT.

Approach:
DATA-DRIVEN
& PUBLIC
NARRATIVES



We continue to make these data and maps available for public consumption. See maps presented on the <u>UConn HDI</u> Website and Tableau.



## Collaborations & Community Engagement

In response to the racial/ethnic disparities in COVID-19 across Connecticut, UConn HDI brainstormed a series of strategic actions to reduce these disparities. We engaged with our coalition members on the Equal Coverage to Care Coalition and Boys and Men of Color Multi-Sector Alliance to identify priorities for action.

- We created a survey to assess priorities among our partner organizations. Over 45 organizations received the survey and 22 organizations responded. We convened these multi-sector organizations for discussion of the priorities that emerged from the survey. The result of this coalition engagement was an advocacy tool, the "Racial/Ethnic Disparities in COVID-19: Priorities for Action" report.
- In the report, these priorities are set forth by multi-sector organizations currently delivering urgently needed social, economic, spiritual support and health services to people of color. These short, mid, and long-term priorities for action are aimed at reducing racial/ethnic disparities in COVID-19 across Connecticut. The group of multi-sector organizations identified testing, contact tracing, hazard pay, and personal protective equipment (PPE) for people of color as priorities for reducing disparities. The group also prioritized the disaggregation of data by race/ethnicity.

RACIAL PROFILING OF BLACK MEN
DURING THE PANDEMIC

ACTUAL STREET OF THE PANDEMIC

Wednesday, May 13, 2020 & 3PM EST

FOR STREET OF THE PANDEMIC STREET OF THE PA

In response to the racist murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and Black men and women across the nation, HDI organized a series of virtual

gatherings and conversations on racial profiling of Black men and women during the pandemic,

facilitated by Dr. Wizdom Powell.

HDI partnered with COLLABORATION
Amplify, Inc. and
the Ministerial Health
Fellowship to host a town
hall and community conversation (fishbowl

dialogue) series on healing from COVID-19 and racism, with a focus on behavioral health. Dr. Powell gave the keynote address at the town hall and facilitated the



Approach:

COMMUNITY

ENGAGEMENT &

fishbowl dialogue. Four state legislators and the Office of Health Strategy attended these events.

Led by the UConn Asian and Asian American Studies Institute (AAASI), the Afro Yaqui Music Collective, the People's Collective for Justice and Liberation, and Kamora's Cultural Corner, HDI was proud to partner on the Black Art Heals event in July 2020. With generous co-sponsorship from the Africana Studies Institute, Center for Treatment of Developmental Trauma Disorder and the Center for Trauma Recovery and Juvenile Justice, we partnered in this event because



of our shared commitment to racial justice and foundational belief that the arts and creative expression are the most powerful vehicle for healing and transformation.

### **Educational Mission**

The HDI health equity leadership program is a crucial part of fulfilling our educational mission and during the pandemic, our team worked to ensure students had continued access to training and leadership development opportunities remotely.

• Four students completed their internship experience. Students also met with their individual preceptors two times a week for support, check-ins, and encouragement. Additionally, students participated in an HDI-led seminar series covering topics of health equity including a health equity 101 two-part seminar, trauma, nutrition and health behavior, and food policy and systems in collaboration with UConn Faculty. During the summer, we offered students opportunities for their practicum and research experience. Two students complete their MPH practicum while three students gained individual research in medical debt patient perspectives, health

socialization and masculinities, and practical skills in topics pertaining to incarceration, trauma, behavioral health among boys and men of color.

Approach:
RESEARCH,
TRAINING, &
INNOVATION

- Two UConn School of Medicine students interviewed HDI team for PACTS Health Disparities Conference in April 2020. This conference included 110 medical students who had an opportunity to learn about UConn HD's pre-pandemic efforts to advance health equity and our current initiatives.
- We received requests to train residents in the UConn Pediatrics Residency Program at Connecticut Children's Medical Center in health equity and health disparities, particularly in the midst of the pandemic. Dr. Powell presented on April 28, 2020 on the topic of Health Disparities & Health Equity in the Time of COVID-19.



### Articles, Presentations, & Media

#### **Op-Eds and Articles**

Our team has published a total of **seven op-eds and articles** focused on the COVID-19 pandemic and health equity.

- Powell, W. Bones in our basements:
   Addressing COVID-19 and incarceration,
   Medical News Today, September 7, 2020.
- Villagra, V. Can the COVID-19 Pandemic
   Save Other Lives? The Donaghue Foundation
   Soapbox, July 8, 2020.
- Powell, W. <u>It's time to speak unapologetically</u> to Black America's emotional wounds, *Medical News Today*, July 4, 2020.
- Powell, W. This Father's Day I'm grieving with Black children who have lost their fathers to police brutality. Here's why you should also mourn and how to support them, Business Insider, June 21, 2020.
- Villagra, V., & Coman, E. There are tools to address the racial/ethnic health disparities exposed to the coronavirus, CT Mirror (CT Viewpoints), May 22, 2020
- Everette, T. & Powell, W. <u>Data to promote</u> health equity amid multiple threats of <u>COVID-19</u>, CT News Junkie, April 14, 2020
- Powell, W. & Everette, T. Why we Need to be talking about health equity during the Coronavirus pandemic, Hartford Courant, April 11, 2020

#### **Presentations/Webinars**

Powell, W., 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Dads Matter Too
 Conference on Reshaping Fatherhood with a
 Racial Justice Lens: Striving for Health Equity,
 Keynote Address, September 18, 2020, virtual.

- Powell, W., Let's Talk About Healing Strategies: Public Health Crisis, COVID-19, & Racism Conversation Starter, CT Office of the Governor, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and Department of Children and Families, September 10, 2020, virtual.
- **Powell, W.**, <u>It's time for radical healing</u>, TedX Santa Barbara, July 29, 2020, virtual.
- Powell, W., <u>A Hidden Pandemic: Mental Health, Trauma, and Racial Healing</u>,
   Community-Campus Partnership for Health and UNC Center for Health Equity Research,
   July 8, 2020, virtual.
- Powell, W., Healing through COVID-19 and Racism: Bridging behavioral health gaps to build health communities, Keynote Address at Amplify Town Hall, June 24, 2020, virtual.
- Powell, W., How Race, Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity Impact Treatment of Trauma, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, June 16, 2020, virtual.
- Powell, W., Health Inequities: Addressing the Disease Burden in Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Communities, Alliance for Health Policy, June 16, 2020, virtual.
- Powell, W., Beneath the Masks: Men Masculinities, and COVID-19 Disparities, American Psychological Association, June 12, 2020, virtual.
- Powell, W., When We See Them: Optimizing supports for boys and their families amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Durham Nativity School Town Hall, May 2020, virtual.

- Powell, W., <u>Universal Exposure</u>, <u>Disproportionate Impact: the Imperative</u> of an Equity Response to Pandemic and <u>Healthcare</u>, CT Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity, May 27, 2020, virtual.
- Powell, W., <u>COVID-19 and Challenges</u>
   <u>Faced by Diverse Families Parenting</u>
   <u>in the Age of COVID-19</u>, American
   Psychological Association, May 14, 2020, virtual.
- Powell, W., <u>The Stage is Set: The Imperative of Leadership Now,</u> CT
   Commission on Women, Children, Seniors, Equity & Opportunity, May 6, 2020, virtual.
- Powell, W., CT Black and Puerto Rican Caucus Tele-Health Town Hall, Keynote Address, April 30, 2020, virtual.
- Powell, W., Justice for All: Pandemic
   Response in Incarcerated Populations,
   Community-Campus Partnership for
   Health and UNC Center for Health Equity
   Research, April 29, 2020, virtual.
- Powell, W., Same River Twice?
   Reflections on Centering Health Equity in
   Connecticut's COVID-19 Response, Keynote
   Address at Ministerial Health Fellowship
   Town Hall, April 15, 2020, virtual.
- Villagra, V., COVID-19 and Social Determinants of Health, Connecticut Maternal Mortality Review Committee, April 2020, virtual.

#### **Media Interviews**

Our team has been actively engaging with the public through multiple media outlets, including newspapers and podcasts. Please see below for a list of media interviews and coverage of our work that resulted in published pieces.

- State's Black leaders and pastors react with dismay to suggestion by Connecticut governor that Black churches should help lead support for COVID-19 vaccine, Hartford Courant, September 13, 2020
- The federal government will pay COVID-19 bills for Connecticut's uninsured, but do they know that?, CT Mirror, July 9, 2020
- Racism Is a Health Crisis. Why Aren't We <u>Treating It Like One?</u>, *Healthline*, June 23, 2020
- Race is not the reason Black Americans have a higher risk of dying from the coronavirus. It's racism, Business Insider, June 19, 2020
- White Shame: How To Convert Guilt into Action, Inverse, June 17, 2020
- Amid the Protests and pandemic, a new call for health equity reform, CT Mirror, June 15, 2020
- Hacen un Nuevo Llamado a la Reforma de Equidad en Salud en Connecticut, Identidad Latina, June 15, 2020
- Depression and anxiety spiked among black Americans after George Floyd's death, The Washington Post, June 13, 2020
  - Also appeared in Anchorage News;
     UConn Today; Fox DC; National
     Collaborative; News Break
- Beyond Protests: 5 More Ways To Channel Anger Into Action to Fight Racism,
   Morning Edition, National Public Radio,
   June 7, 2020

### Articles, Presentations, & Media (continued)

- Doctors Clarify Why Racism Against Black Americans is a Public Health Crisis, Inverse, June 3, 2020
- Your Anger is Healthy (Especially Right Now), According to A Psychologist, Well and Good, June 2, 2020
- Experts: Disparities in Hispanic and black coronavirus death rates worse than previously reported, CT Mirror & CT Post, May 29, 2020
  - Also appeared in Meriden Record-Journal, Waterbury Republican American
- Employees in Some Industries Face Risking COVID-19 Or Losing Their Jobs and Benefits, KCUR, Kansas Public Radio, May 22, 2020
- Frustration growing in minority communities over government's response to pandemic, The CT Mirror, May 12, 2020
- As coronavirus testing expands to Hartford's vulnerable communities, advocates see chance to mend decades of mistrust, Hartford Courant, May 7, 2020

- Connecticut is battling coronavirus as it moves across the state, but for Hartford and Bridgeport, COVID-19 fight brings added dangers, Hartford Courant, April 19, 2020
- Pandemic exposes stark health disparities generations in the making, Connecticut Health-I-Team, April 16, 2020
  - Also appeared in CT Mirror
- Black and Latino residents hit particular hard by COVID-19 in Connecticut, as experts fear disparities will widen, The Hartford Courant, April 8, 2020
- UConn researchers find blacks are disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, CT News Junkie, April, 8, 2020
- Let's focus on Health Equity NOT Health
   <u>Disparities, Raising Equity Podcast</u> with Dr.
   Kira Banks, April 24, 2020, Aired on Facebook,
   Twitter, Spotify, Apple Podcast
- Preliminary Data Raise Questions about Coronavirus Risks for Connecticut Residents of Color, Connecticut Public Radio, April 5, 2020

