



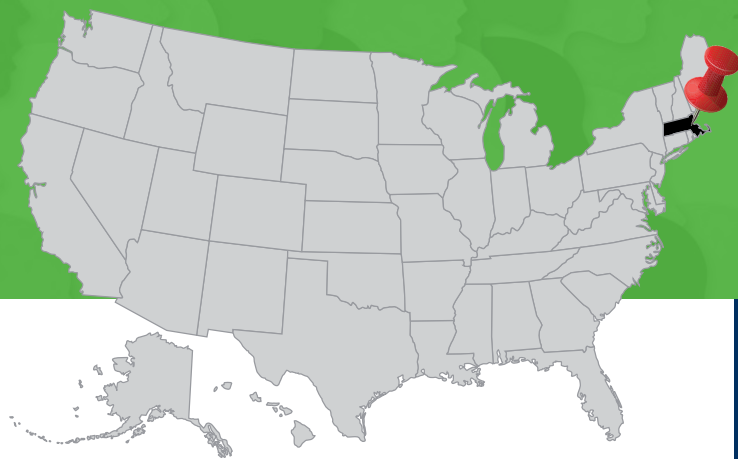
# Racism as a Public Health Crisis: From Declaration to Action

## Over 200 Declarations Later

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**A**PHA has been gathering, cataloging, and monitoring city and municipality [Racism Declarations since June 2020](#). Our October 2021 analysis assessed what was included in these declarations and what commitments these places made to advance health and racial equity.

We understand the declarations themselves are often symbolic, and what has impact and creates change is turning advocacy and symbolic gestures into action. To demonstrate the possibilities for these declarations to have meaningful impact, take a journey with us from coast to coast to see what different localities across the country have been doing to advance racial and health equity since they passed their declaration.



# Boston, Massachusetts

**Population: 675,000+**  
**45% White, 22% Black,**  
**20%, Hispanic/Latino, 10% Asian**

Boston has a long [history of struggling with racism](#), including violent protests targeting school desegregation efforts in the 1970s and a [persistent wealth gap](#) between white and Black residents. According to the [Health of Boston Report](#), persistent disparities in health outcomes for Black and Hispanic Bostonians compared to white residents include birth outcomes and rates and impact of asthma, diabetes, hypertension, and other chronic conditions.

In May 2020, Mayor Martin Walsh created a new [COVID-19 Health Inequities Task Force](#) to provide guidance to the City of Boston on addressing current inequities in data analysis, testing sites, and health care services for Black, Hispanic, Asian and immigrant residents.

On June 11, 2020, Boston Police Commissioner William Gross announced the completed review of Boston Police's policies against the recommended use of force policies outlined in the "[8 Can't Wait](#)" effort, resulting in [clarified rules and the implementation of several reforms](#).

## EXECUTIVE ORDER

On June 12, 2020, then-Mayor Martin Walsh [declared racism a public health crisis](#) through an executive order. This declaration included a commitment to eight key strategies focused on addressing the impact that racism has on the lives of residents and their overall health. Mayor Walsh released funds, by redirecting about \$3 million of Boston Police Overtime funding in FY21 Budget resubmission to the Boston Public Health Commission, for work related to the eight strategies to reduce racial health disparities in the city.

On the same day, Walsh also signed on to the "Reimagining Policing" pledge for mayors and local officials issued by the Obama Foundation's My Brother's Keeper Alliance. The [Boston Racial Equity Fund](#) was created in June 2020 to increase the safety, well-being, equity, and prosperity of the Black and Brown community. By May, the fund had distributed \$16.2 million in funding, with 40% of grantees led by a person of color and 63% led by women.

## BOSTON REVIEWS POLICE USE OF FORCE POLICIES

In June 2020, Walsh also created a [new Boston Police Reform Task Force](#) made up of an independent group of community members and chaired by former U.S. Attorney for the District of Massachusetts Wayne Budd, charged with:

- ▶ reviewing Boston Police's use of force policies;
- ▶ recommending rigorous implicit bias training for police officers;

- ▶ improving the current Body Worn Camera program at Boston Police; and
- ▶ strengthening Boston’s existing police review board, known as the Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel or Co-op Board.

As part of Mayor Walsh’s Fiscal Year 2021 budget, he allocated 20%, or \$12 million, of the Boston Police Department’s overtime budget to make a significant investment in equity and inclusion across the city. On June 30, Walsh signed an [ordinance banning face surveillance technology](#), which protects community members from [racial bias as a result of this technology](#).

## POLICE OVERSIGHT

In October 2020, the Boston Police Reform Task Force released their [recommendations](#) for reform, which included:

1. Create an independent Office of Police Accountability and Transparency with full investigatory and subpoena power, i.e. the ability to call witnesses and to compel the discovery of documents.
2. Formalize and expand the BPD’s commitment to diversity and inclusion through the creation of a Diversity & Inclusion unit.
3. Expand the BPD’s adoption of the body-worn camera program and continue to ban the use of biometrics and facial recognition software.
4. Enhance the BPD’s Use of Force policies (Rule 303, Rule 303A, Rule 303B, Rule 304) to articulate a clear and enforceable disciplinary code of consequences for violations and infractions and hold the BPD publicly accountable for the violation of these policies.
5. Adopt practices that maximize accountability, transparency and public access to the BPD.

In November 2020, Walsh:

- ▶ [signed an Executive Order](#) to reconstitute Boston’s Community Ombudsman Oversight Panel and transform it into a stronger Internal Affairs Oversight Panel;
- ▶ created Boston’s first Civilian Review Board of this kind, with a nine-member board made up of community members nominated by the City Council and the Mayor’s Office; and
- ▶ filed an [ordinance](#) to create a new independent Office of Police Accountability and Transparency, which passed in city council the following month.



**As part of Mayor Walsh’s Fiscal Year 2021 budget, he allocated 20%, or \$12 million, of the Boston Police Department’s overtime budget to make a significant investment in equity and inclusion across the city.**

## CONTINUING FORWARD

On Jan.4, 2021, Walsh signed [an ordinance establishing the new Office of Police Accountability and Transparency](#). In February, the [Boston Racial Equity Fund joined efforts with the New Commonwealth Fund](#) to collaborate on advancing racial equity and dismantling systemic racism in the City of Boston and Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Walsh resigned as mayor of Boston in March after being sworn in as the U.S. Secretary of Labor. In June 2021, Acting Mayor Kim Janey expanded public involvement in Boston's budget, creating the city's [first participatory budgeting office](#). Mayor Janey signed off on a ballot question to amend the City of Boston Charter that will strike a more equal balance of budgetary powers between the Mayor and the City Council and allocated an additional \$1 million in the City's proposed Fiscal Year 2022 Budget, dedicated to the immediate creation of the City's first Office of Participatory Budgeting

On Sept. 23, Mayor Janey signed an [ordinance](#) establishing Boston's first Black Men and Boys Commission, made up of 21 Black men and boys who will advise the Mayor on issues specific to that group.

### BOSTON'S RACIAL EQUITY STRATEGY PLAN

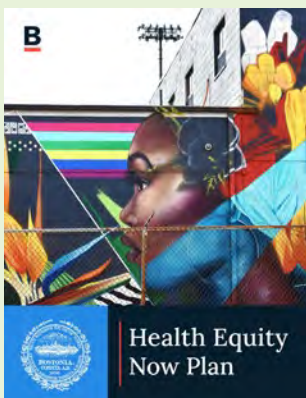


Image credit: [City of Boston](#)

In collaboration with the COVID-19 Health Inequities Task Force, the City of Boston's Equity and Inclusion Cabinet, Health and Human Services and the COVID-19 Equity and Recovery consultant team, a racial equity strategy plan

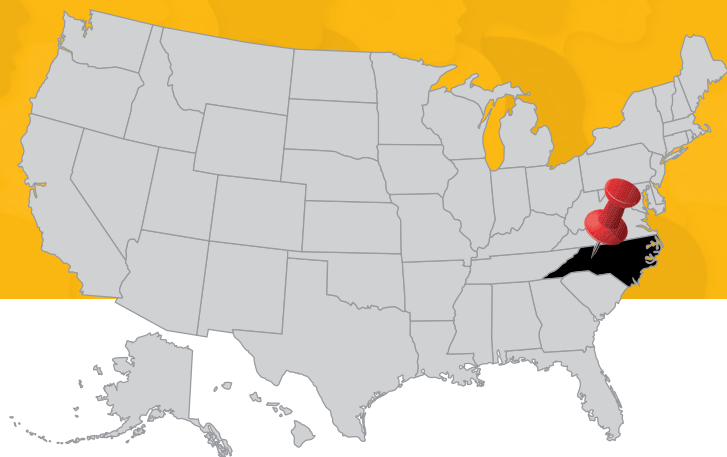
"[Health Equity Now](#)" was released on July 12, 2021. The plan outlines detailed objectives and measurable goals in which Boston will focus on root causes of the inequities.

### A FIRST FOR THE CITY



Image credit: [City of Boston](#)

On Nov. 18, 2021, Michelle Wu was officially sworn in as the first woman and first person of color to be [elected Mayor of Boston](#).



# Buncombe County, North Carolina

**Population: 261,000**  
**83% White, 7% Hispanic/Latino,**  
**6% Black, 1% Asian**

## NORTH CAROLINA

Approximately 22% of North Carolina's total population is Black. Yet, Black people make up [52.5% of those serving 20 or more years in prison](#). Another startling statistic: In North Carolina at-large, Black women are [3.8 times](#) more likely than white women to lose their infant in the first year of life.

Buncombe County has a [total population](#) estimate of 261,191, and about 92,000 people live in Asheville, the largest city in Western North Carolina. In Buncombe County, Black people accounted for 25% of the jailed population, despite being 6.3% of the local population.

In Buncombe, the infant mortality rate for Black babies is twice as high as for white infants at 6.4 infant deaths per 1,000 live births — much higher than the U.S. average, which in 2019 was [5.6 infant deaths](#) for every 1,000 live births.

## COMBATING RACIAL INJUSTICE IN BUNCOMBE COUNTY

With an increase in political will and support from North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners was empowered to combat racial injustice at full force beginning around the time of his election in 2017.

In 2018, the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners established the [Justice Resource Advisory Council, or JRAC](#), as an advisory body to focus on systemic planning and coordination of prison-industrial complex in Buncombe. The JRAC aims to “reduce the jail population, divert individuals with mental illness and substance abuse into treatment, and address racial and ethnic disparities.”

## BUNCOMBE'S STRATEGIC PLAN

The Buncombe County Board of Commissioners also created the “2020-2025 Strategic Plan” to address equity within systems, policies, and practices for all people. The plan's two main goals were to: 1) reduce the jail population and enhance public safety; and 2) eliminate deaths as a result of substance abuse.

To build meaningful momentum following the 2025 Buncombe County Strategic Plan, the Board formed an [Equity and Inclusion Workgroup](#) within the Equity & Human Rights Office to develop policy recommendations to reform racial equity issues within county governance. The Workgroup identifies and addresses structural and policy barriers to providing equal employment opportunities in the workforce.

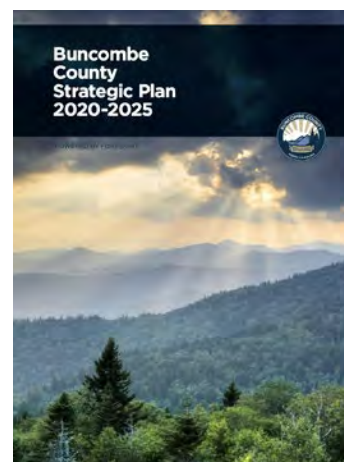


Image credit: Buncombe County, NC

## RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH AND SAFETY CRISIS



Image credit: Buncombe County, NC

The Buncombe County Board of Commissioners on August 4, 2020, unanimously approved a [resolution](#) declaring racism as a public health and safety crisis.

The resolution included actionable commitments for the county board to carry out, such as:

- ▶ Conduct an assessment and make recommendations to the County Manager and Board of Commissioners on how to make changes to education organizations to understand, address and dismantle racism and its' effects on individual and population health.
- ▶ Ensure racial equity is a core element of Buncombe County Health and Human Services.
- ▶ Assess and revise all portions of codified health regulations through a racial equity lens.

Ultimately, multiple ongoing [community efforts and the work of local leaders](#) in racial justice and public health culminated in three resolutions declaring racism as a public health and safety crisis:

1. Health and Human Services Board: Resolution Declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis
2. JRAC: Resolution Declaring Racism a Public Safety Emergency
3. Board of Commissioners: Resolution Declaring Racism a Public Health and Safety Crisis.

## RACIAL EQUITY ACTION PLAN 2025



Image credit: Buncombe County, NC

Almost one year after the adoption of the racial declaration, on June 15, 2021, the County Board of Commissioners formally adopted the draft of the [Race and Equity Action Plan](#) put forth by the Workgroup.

The 24-page "[Racial Equity Action Plan 2025](#)" became effective on July 1, 2021. The document outlines community goals to:

- ▶ create pathways for county agencies and community services to engage in equity practices;
- ▶ provide racial equity education in the community; and
- ▶ improve quality-of-life outcomes through health and racial equity initiatives.

The plan also outlines foundational goals, which include cultivating a thriving and diverse workforce within Buncombe County, instituting organizational policies and processes to ensure equity and accountability. The Equity and Inclusion Workgroup implemented a results-based accountability model for evaluating progress around equity and inclusion — a model originally adopted by [GARE](#) to advance and measure racial equity in the local government.

Additionally, the Equity and Inclusion Workgroup will share updates on the Racial Equity Action Plan with the Buncombe County Board of Commissioners at least twice a year through a public-accessible dashboard that illustrates key performance indicators to show the community how well they are doing.

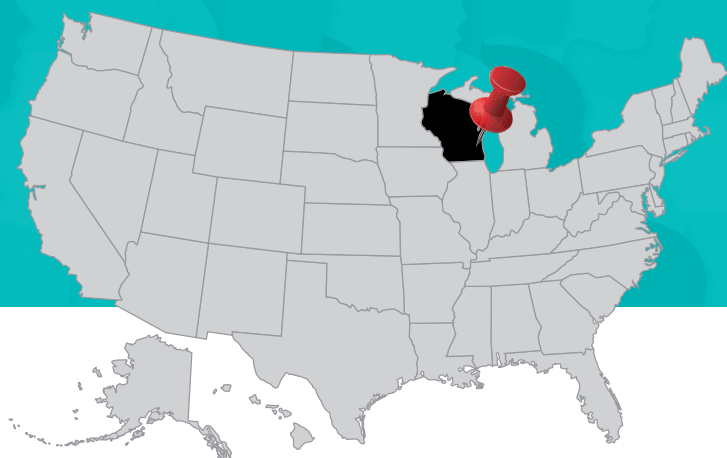
Most recently, the county created a new position in the FY 2022 operating budget, “Chief Equity and Human Rights Officer.” This officer reports directly to an Assistant County Manager and will lead the development, implementation, monitoring, and improvement of government initiatives that promote anti-racism, antidiscrimination, diversity, equity, and inclusion in the county. The officer will also serve as a key liaison for the implementation of the Racial Equity Action Plan.

## CHANGES TO THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM



Image credit: [Buncombe County, NC](#)

The same week the resolution passed, the county hired an equity and inclusion consultant to develop and implement trainings for criminal justice system staff in racial equity, structural and systemic racism, and implicit bias. Additionally, the county launched a multi-sectoral Community Engagement Workgroup to increase community healing and decrease violence in the Buncombe criminal justice system. The team includes a trauma-informed specialist, community health worker, and a youth mentor.



# Milwaukee County, Wisconsin

**Population: 939,000+**  
**51% White, 26% Black,**  
**15% Hispanic/Latino, 4% Asian**

Of Milwaukee County's total population, 26% are Black — the largest throughout the state's counties — and Hispanics comprise 15% of the population. Some of the city's struggles include:

- ▶ Milwaukee is [ranked](#) among the least healthy counties in Wisconsin.
- ▶ According to [2020 data](#) from the Wisconsin Department of Health Services, the infant mortality rate of non-Hispanic Black infants is nearly three times higher than for white infants.
- ▶ Every year, the Milwaukee metropolitan area is listed at or near the top of the list of most-segregated communities in the country.
- ▶ According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 17% of Milwaukeeans live in poverty and only 31% have received a bachelor's degree or higher.

## OFFICE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN AFFAIRS

In 2017, the [Office of African American Affairs](#) was created with an aim to address the county's racial inequities by providing advice, guidance, training and technical assistance to normalize, operationalize and institutionalize racial equity within the county's budget and operations, policymaking, community engagement, and program/services delivery.

## THE FIRST DECLARATION

The first declaration of racism as a public health crisis came from outside the government, developed in 2018 by the Wisconsin Public Health Association. This led the way for Milwaukee County and the city of Milwaukee to do the same in May and July 2019, respectively. On May 20, 2019, Milwaukee County became the first jurisdiction in the United States to [declare racism a public health crisis](#), committing the county to eliminate institutional racism by addressing county policies, practices, and power structures that, intentionally or unintentionally, work in favor for some and create barriers for others.

## STRATEGIC PLAN TO ACHIEVE HEALTH AND RACIAL EQUITY

In 2019, Milwaukee County launched the [Racial Equity Ambassador program](#) to elevate employees at all levels of Milwaukee County's departments to advance racial equity. The program committed 60 employees to a 2-year timeframe to normalize, operationalize and institutionalize racial equity initiatives across the county.

In 2019, Milwaukee County launched its first strategic plan in 20 years, focusing on achieving health and racial equity and explicitly recognizing "racism as a public health crisis." As part of the strategic plan, Milwaukee County leaders have committed to using a racial equity budget tool to ensure resource allocations advance the strategic focus areas and vision.



## ONE YEAR LATER



Image credit: Milwaukee County

In May 2020, a year after passing a first-of-its-kind resolution declaring racism as a public health crisis, Milwaukee County passed an ordinance “[Achieving Racial Equity and Health](#),” committing them to identify and address policies, practices and power structures that, whether intentionally or unintentionally, work in favor of white people and create barriers for Black, Brown, Indigenous people and people of color. Milwaukee County also adopted the “[Health and Equity Framework](#),” adapted from the Wisconsin Population Health Institute’s model, as its guiding framework for addressing the root causes of institutional and systemic racism.

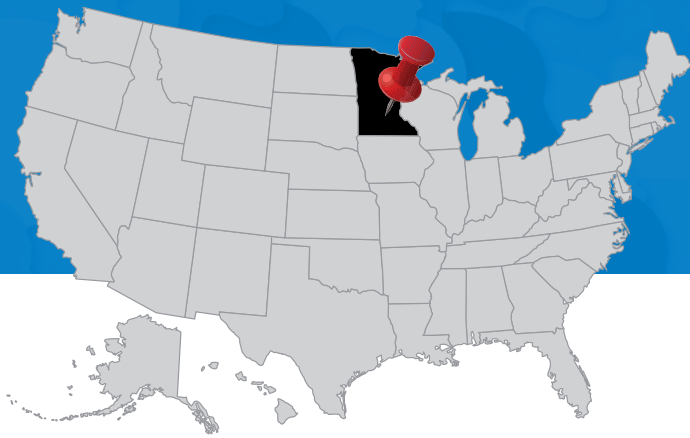


The Office on African American Affairs developed a [racial equity budgeting tool](#) for the 2021 budget cycle, a tool for departments to apply a racial equity lens to its budgeting to tackle root causes of injustice. On June 15, 2020, [Juneteenth became a floating holiday](#) for Milwaukee County employees to honor and celebrate Black life and attend Juneteenth Day celebrations throughout Milwaukee.

Image credit: Milwaukee County

## EQUITABLE COVID-19 RESPONSE

The Milwaukee County Office of Emergency Management created the [Evaluating Vulnerability and Equity, or EVE, Model](#), a tool developed to address racial disparities. Using EVE to evaluate and guide equitable vaccine deployment strategies across the county, in March 2021. Milwaukee County and the City of Milwaukee announced they would [increase vaccine access for individuals living in the 10 most vulnerable zip codes](#) — becoming one of the few counties in the nation to use the Center for Disease Control and Prevention’s Social Vulnerability Index to target COVID-19 vaccine outreach and increase vaccine equity.



# Minneapolis, Minnesota

**Population: 420,000+**  
**60% White, 19% Black,**  
**10% Hispanic/Latino, 5% Asian**

## THE MINNESOTA PARADOX

While the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul in Minnesota are consistently ranked as having the highest standards of living — with high incomes, high levels of educational attainment, low housing prices, and long life expectancy — they also rank as having the largest racial inequities in the U.S. This contradicting status as the best place to live, but the worst for Black residents, is known as “[the Minnesota Paradox](#).”

Minneapolis is considered one of the cities in the U.S. with some of the [greatest racial disparities](#) in housing, income and education. In 2017, the Minneapolis City Council passed an [ordinance](#) to create a permanent Division of Race and Equity within the city coordinator’s office. The City of Minneapolis adopted a [Strategic and Racial Equity Action Plan \(SREAP\)](#) and included using racially disaggregated data in decisionmaking and engagement with diverse communities via Appointed Boards and Commissions as an operational priority in 2019; a [Racial Equity Impact Analysis](#) was adopted as part of the SREAP implementation.

## ACKNOWLEDGING A HISTORY OF POLICE BRUTALITY



Image credit: “Protest” by Chad Davis/CC BY 2.0

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd was killed by use of excessive force by a police officer in Minneapolis. The city has a [long history of racial inequity and policy brutality](#), leading to the Minnesota Department of Human Rights filing a [civil rights charge](#) on June 2, 2020, against the Minneapolis Police Department to investigate the department’s policies, procedures and practices over the past 10 years to determine if they engaged in systemic discriminatory practices.

## RACISM AS A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY



Image credit: "George Floyd Memorial" by Fibonacci Blue/CC BY 2.0

In the wake of George Floyd's death and with inequities for Black, Indigenous, and people of color further exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic, the Minneapolis City Council approved a resolution [declaring racism as a public health emergency](#) on July 17, 2020.

## TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

In October 2020, the City Council approved a [resolution establishing a truth and reconciliation process](#) for the City of Minneapolis. In October, Mayor Frey also announced a new [Minneapolis Strategic Outreach Initiative](#), which was launched in September 2020 to respond to urgent concerns around violence. This pilot program draws from strategies like [Cure Violence](#), which has been effectively implemented across the globe.

The 2021 budget included funding that called for the Office of Violence Prevention to continue toward longer-term, broader implementation of the Minneapolis violence intervention model. The mayor and city council allocated \$2.5 million of ongoing funding to the Office of Violence Prevention to fund the initiative, which has teams of violence interrupters and outreach workers in neighborhoods to identify and mediate potentially violent conflicts and provide additional follow-up to ensure conflicts do not reignite.

## POLICE REFORM IN MINNEAPOLIS

In November 2020, Mayor Frey and Police Chief Medaria Arradondo issued an official policy governing the use of unannounced or "no-knock" warrants in the city of Minneapolis. Under the new policy, Minneapolis Police Department officers are required to announce their presence and purpose prior to entry, outside of exigent circumstances like a hostage situation. The new policy is intended to add transparency and shared expectations for community and codifies best practices in the department's Special Weapons and Tactics, or SWAT, Unit.

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**“Racism as a Public Health Emergency” declaration was released on June 24, 2021, describing the city’s ongoing work to meet the commitments made in the declaration, additional work that can be undertaken to meet those commitments, a timeline of the work, and measures for success.**

In August 2020, Mayor Frey and Chief Arradondo announced changes to MPD’s use of force policy to make it as stringent as possible under state law. The new policy requires that:

- ▶ officers use the lowest level of force needed to safely engage a subject; and
- ▶ officers first consider all reasonable alternatives before using deadly force.

Also included:

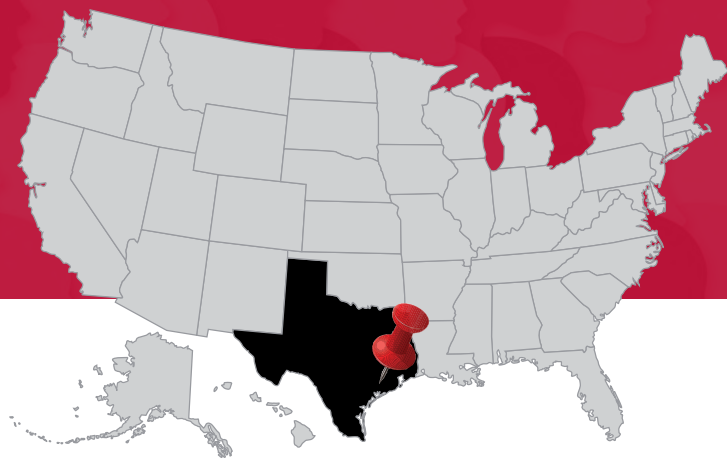
- ▶ revisions to what constitutes the use of force to include the threat of force;
- ▶ prohibiting behavior that incites or escalates a situation; and
- ▶ a ban on shooting at moving vehicles (with limited exceptions).

### **ONE YEAR POST-DECLARATION**

An [update](#) to the “Racism as a Public Health Emergency” declaration was released on June 24, 2021, describing the city’s ongoing work to meet the commitments made in the declaration, additional work that can be undertaken to meet those commitments, a timeline of the work, and measures for success.

In May 2021, a city employee letter was filed, [declaring a collective commitment](#) to working in an anti-racist way and toward an equitable environment.

In August 2021, Mayor Frey and Chief Arradondo announced another series of reforms to create a more just and accountable system of community safety and reduce racial disparities in traffic enforcement. Minneapolis Police Officers will no longer be conducting pretextual stops for offenses like expired tabs, an item dangling from a mirror, or an expired license. In addition, the City Attorney’s Office will stop prosecuting tickets for driving after suspension when the only basis for the suspension was a failure to pay fines or fees and there was no accident or other egregious driving behavior that would impact public safety.



# Austin, Texas

**Population: 961,800+**  
**49% White, 33% Hispanic/Latino,**  
**8% Asian, 7% Black**

While Austin, Texas is a predominately white, the city has taken a large step in the fight toward racial justice to rectify its longstanding racist and discriminatory past.

Austin is geographically organized along racial lines. In 2014, Austin was one of the [most economically and racially segregated](#) large metropolitan areas in the United States. Today, as Austin becomes a destination city for people wanting to relocate and those with means move in, housing prices and property taxes skyrocket. In turn, longstanding residents can no longer afford to live in the heart of the city and move away. As a result, wealthier residential areas in Austin are overwhelmingly white, and lower-income areas have the highest concentrations of Black and Hispanic/Latino people. These areas are also home to under-resourced schools, sparse health care services, fewer transportation options, poor access to healthy foods, and fewer environmental protections.

## AUSTIN'S HISTORY OF URBAN REMOVAL



Residential economic and racial segregation of East Austin has been driven by past zoning laws, ordinances, and city planning tactics that were explicitly discriminatory and directly responsible for the segregation and gentrification that still stands today. For example, the [Koch and Fowler city plan](#), also known as the "1928 Master Plan," created the "Negro District" in what is now Austin's City Council District 1. The plan intentionally sought to restrict Black people to one area of Austin to segregate the races and resulted in the intentional restriction of resources for Black people. The city council, comprised entirely of white men, [adopted the Master Plan](#) on March 22, 1928.

More recently, federally funded urban renewal programs in the 1960s-70s, now referred to as "urban removal," displaced people of color from large urban areas to cheaper, outlying areas. These programs were intended to turn formerly residential land into parks and schools, but did not attempt to offer adequate resources or opportunities for displaced households.

Image credit: Koch and Fowler. A City Plan for Austin, Texas. Austin, Texas: City of Austin, 1928.

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**Institutional racism in each of the five sectors negatively impacts the lives of people of color in Austin. For example, in the education sector, racism can impact an individual's ability to obtain a livable-wage paying job, which effects one's ability to obtain safe housing, and, in turn, can contribute to poor health outcomes.**

## **EQUITY OFFICE**

Over the past decade, Austin has taken steps toward correcting the city's inequitable and racist past.

In 2016, Austin's Mayor, Steve Adler, created the [Equity Office](#) to partner with non-profit and local community organizations, and to work across all city departments. The goal of the Equity Office was, and still is, to build capacity and leadership from a racial equity lens by offering multiple trainings and one-on-one equity consultations.

## **INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND SYSTEMIC INEQUITIES**

In March 2017, Adler established the [Mayor's Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities](#) after the [death of 17-year-old David Joseph](#) in 2016. Joseph was an unarmed Black teen who was shot twice in the chest and killed by an Austin police officer. The Task Force was charged with creating a report inclusive of a list of recommendations aimed at dismantling institutional racism and systemic inequities in Austin. The Task Force was comprised of concerned citizens working in one of the following five working groups: education; real estate and housing; health, finance, banking, and industry; and civil and criminal justice.

One common theme the report touched upon was how institutional racism in each of the five sectors negatively impacts the lives of people of color in Austin. For example, in the education sector, racism can impact an individual's ability to obtain a livable-wage paying job, which effects one's ability to obtain safe housing, and, in turn, can contribute to poor health outcomes.

## **"RACISM HAS CAUSED A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS IN THE CITY"**

On July 30, 2020, following the murders of Michael Ramos and George Floyd by police in April and May 2020, respectively, Austin's City Council passed a [resolution](#) declaring that "racism has caused a public health crisis in the city." The resolution included a statement that Austin's overall prosperity depends on equal access to opportunity for every resident regardless of the color of their skin. The declaration also acknowledged Austin's history of racist policies, such as red-lining and the "1928 Master Plan."

The resolution also states that the residual effects of racism in Austin are still experienced today through negative health outcomes and disadvantage Black people when it comes to the social determinants of health — including areas such as housing, education, businesses, employment and criminal justice.

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**Austin City Council took actions to reimagine public safety and law enforcement. The diversion of money from the police budget was reinvested into community safety programs and mental health resources.**

## **DIVERSION OF POLICE FUNDS**



George Floyd Protest in Austin, TX. Image credit: [Charles Spirtos](#)

After the passing of the resolution, the city took several immediate actions targeting the criminal justice and policing system. In August 2020, one month after the resolution passed, the Austin City Council unanimously voted to [reduce APD's budget by \\$150 million](#) to reinvest resources into improving community safety. This reduction of funds was a larger percentage cut to a police budget than in the nearly two dozen other cities that also cut law enforcement funding during summer 2020.

The council took this action primarily due to community pressure and the widespread public support for defunding the police in the wake of summer 2020 protests against police brutality. The city had just witnessed thousands of protesters flooding the streets, highways and police headquarters demanding change. In response, Austin's local leaders leaped into action, reimaging public safety and the next generation of law enforcement.

The diversion of money from the police budget, primarily from cadet classes and overtime, were reinvested into community safety programs and mental health resources. Other funds were reallocated from the police department to fund independent programs, such as the forensics lab and 911 dispatch, to improve quality.

## VOTERS REJECT EXPANDING POLICE FORCE

In November 2021, there was pushback against the prior year's budget cuts. [Proposition A](#) was proposed and set for a vote on Nov. 2, 2021, and if it passed, Austin officials would drastically increase the ranks of the city's police force.

Supporters of Proposition A argued that boosting the ranks of the police force was necessary to combat the city's growing homicide rate, a trend seen in cities nationwide.

Opponents of Proposition A, including Mayor Steve Adler, feared financial fallout for the city if the proposition passed, as deep cuts in the city's budget would lead to fewer firefighters, medics, librarians and mental health resources.

While Austin citizens voted to reject the ballot proposition to hire more police officers, opposition to defunding the police will not easily disappear. The fight toward racial justice involves reimagining the system of policing and the structural racism the system was founded on.

## WHAT AUSTIN IS DOING

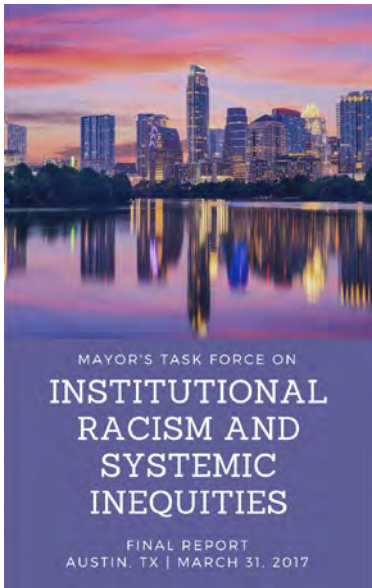
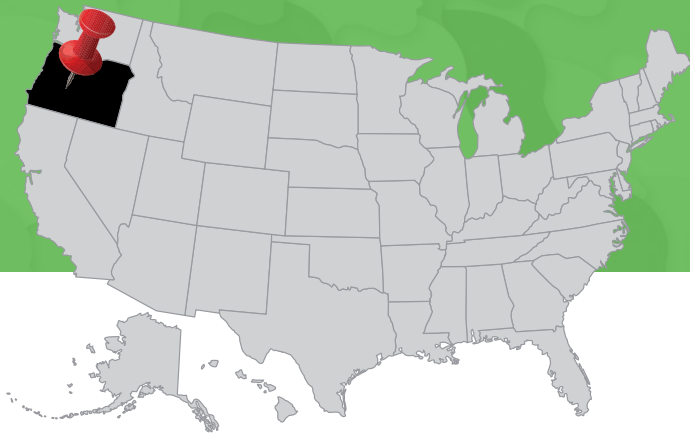


Image credit: [City of Austin, TX](#)

Additional actions aimed at criminal justice and policing in Austin are in progress. These include increased staffing for mental health first responders and funding established to fully implement First Responder Mental Health Calls for Service. The reforms also include increased funding for offices of Police Oversight and Equity. The [Office of Police Oversight](#) is responsible for the impartial oversight of the Austin Police Department. When people have concerns or complaints about potential police misconduct, the Office investigates and resolve those concerns.

As next steps, the city council's declaring racism as a public health crisis, included specific action items for Austin officials to carry out. The resolution asks the city's Equity Office to review recommendation's from the Mayor's Task Force on Institutional Racism and Systemic Inequities and make new recommendations in education, housing, health, finance, and civil and criminal justice.





# Multnomah County, Oregon

**Population: 815,000+**  
**69% White, 12% Hispanic/Latino,**  
**7% Asian, 5% Black**



This image of hooded, robed KKK members posing with some of the state's most powerful officials, including the police chief and district attorney, was published by a Portland newspaper in 1921. Image credit: [The Portland Telegraph, Aug. 2, 1921](#)

The largest city in Multnomah County is Portland, Oregon. Known for its diverse food scene and bustling downtown area, Portland is notably a hub of progressive movements and the assimilation of cultures. However, Portland's past is full of racism and exclusion (see image above).

Over the past two decades, the number of Black adults in Multnomah increased by **71%**, and the number of Hispanic/Latino adults increased by **429%**. However, Multnomah County still has a demographic makeup that is predominately white.

While census data show Multnomah County's demographic make-up is becoming more diverse, clear race-based health disparities persist. In fact, "[life expectancy in Multnomah County](#) varies by up to 20 years by ethnic group." Additionally, data from 2019 indicates disturbing [racial disparities](#) in Multnomah County's criminal justice system. In 2019, Black people were 8.3 times more likely to be in jail pre-trial on any given day than white people. Also, Black adults were 4.8 times as likely as white adults to have a case issued for prosecution, and 4.6 times as likely to have a case that ends in a conviction. For comparison, Hispanic/Latino adults in Multnomah County were 1.3 times as likely as white adults to have a case issued for prosecution.

## MULTNOMAH'S HISTORY OF ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION



Image credit: Multnomah County, OR

Multnomah County has recognized racism as a public health issue and is focused on creating actionable pathways to address systemic oppression.

Prior to the summer 2020 protests and official declaration of racism as a public health crisis, Multnomah County officials had already taken action to ensure access, equity, and inclusion in all services and policies. For instance, [The Office of Diversity and Equity](#) was created in 2014 to ensure access, equity, and inclusion in Multnomah County's services, policies, practices and procedures.

Likewise, the Multnomah County Health Department, through its [Workforce Equity Initiative](#), has committed to recruiting and retaining employees of color in an intentional effort to build a multiracial public health workforce. Through this initiative, county employees have worked

together to develop and implement a [Workforce Equity Strategic Plan](#) to identify structural and policy barriers to addressing institutional racism and equity in the workplace.

## WORKING WITH COMMUNITY PARTNERS

[Additional actions](#) the health department had taken prior to 2020 include:

- ▶ supporting the Multnomah County Board of Commissioners and Board of Health's capacity to act, using quality improvement tools to develop more racially equitable policies and programs;
- ▶ creating a Public Health Advisory Board and [Community Health Improvement Plan](#);
- ▶ increasing culturally specific and community-specific approaches, including trauma-informed care; and
- ▶ Prioritizing communities of color in efforts to [end and prevent homelessness](#) and change the criminal legal system.

The [Public Health Advisory Board](#) was formed to inform health department decisions and support culturally specific approaches to reducing disparities. The advisory board consists of a group of community members who advise the health department on key decisions affecting the public's health and will help inform work related to disparities reduction.

Primarily, the board advises public health leaders on community health issues, and recommends effective, ethical and equity-focused public health strategies and policies.



Image credit: Multnomah County, OR

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## Multnomah County's FY 2021 budget includes upstream investments redirecting the money saved through divestment into programs that uplift Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.

### UNANIMOUS DECLARATION

Multnomah County passed a [resolution](#) declaring racism a public health crisis unanimously on April 8, 2021 with bi-partisan support.

### TRANSFORMING THE LEGAL SYSTEM THROUGH FUNDING

After the declaration passed, Multnomah's [FY 2021 Adopted Budget](#) was written into effect. Budget cuts were made to specifically reduce jail capacity, as well as capacity in the misdemeanor and pre-trial units in the District Attorney's Office, and permanently suspends parole and probation fees, which disproportionately harm people of color.

The Board of County Commissioners altered the FY 2021 budget to divest more than \$2 million from the Multnomah County Sheriff's Office and District Attorney's Office. These reductions included reduced reliance on jails by closing dorms, reducing funding for staff in the booking facility, and eliminating funding in the District Attorney's Office for prosecutors tasked with overseeing low-level misdemeanors.

Also, the FY 2021 budget includes [upstream investments](#) redirecting the money saved through divestment into programs that uplift Black, Indigenous, and other people of color. The investments are focused on successfully diverting and deflecting people away from entering the criminal legal system, helping those who are reentering the community from places of incarceration, and repairing past harms that come with interacting in the criminal legal system to prevent re-entry into the justice system.

Lastly, the Board of County Commissioners approved \$100,000 in funding to the Reimagining Safety Initiative, a program working to establish an ongoing Black community-led workgroup. Reimagining Safety holds community listening sessions to create and produce policy recommendations for community safety alternatives.

### MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Multnomah County Government has also funded the development of Black-led, culturally appropriate maternal health programs.

The county restored full funding through the FY 2021 budget for maternal and child health programs that specifically serve the Black community. Using funds that came from public safety divestments, this program will identify future needs and opportunities for child and maternal health. More importantly, these maternal health programs will:

- ▶ be culturally appropriate;
- ▶ tackle [health disparities](#) disproportionately harming Black women;
- ▶ support Black community health workers and doula programs;
- ▶ support funding and educating on pregnancy health and prenatal care; and
- ▶ offer supports for new parents learning to care for an infant.

## **RESTORATIVE JUSTICE**

Multnomah is also in the process of implementing more restorative justice programs and policies to uplift communities of color both socially and economically. The first proposal currently in progress, but not yet completed, is mandating restorative justice practices and trainings for educators and students.

Reimagine Oregon is promoting ongoing restorative justice initiatives for when a student or student's family identifies a racist incident or incident of prejudice.

Additionally, the Office of Multnomah County Commissioner Susheela Jayapal is planning a summit in 2022 that will focus on best practices for implementing restorative justice processes and protocols in the County's schools.

## **LOOKING FORWARD**

The County is supporting the ongoing implementation of the [Climate Justice Initiative](#), which seeks to co-create, with front-line BIPOC organizations and individuals, solutions for mitigating and adapting to the climate crisis. Multnomah is also planning to require racial impact statements for certain pieces of legislation. The county now requires an equity lens assessment as part of its legislative review process for bills in the Office of Government Relations. The County Board will continue to review the current practices around the use of equity impact statements and assessments in all adopted legislation, resolutions, ordinances, and other items requiring board action.

## **FROM DECLARATION TO ACTION MAP**

See [endingracism.apha.org](https://endingracism.apha.org) for a storytelling map featuring these communities' efforts to make progress toward racial equity