

To: Dr. Charles Modlin and Members of the Minority Health Strike Force: Education and Outreach Subcommittee

From: Kirstin Craciun, MPP, MSW, Director of Community Outreach at The Center for Health Affairs

Date: June 4, 2020

RE: Written Testimony Regarding COVID-19 Minority Health Strike Force Interim Report

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony to the Minority Health Strike Force's Education and Outreach Subcommittee. We at The Center for Health Affairs applaud the subcommittee for their work and Governor DeWine for taking action to establish the Strike Force to help respond to and address disparities in COVID-19 health outcomes by communities of color, especially African American and Latino communities.

The Center for Health Affairs is a regional hospital trade association serving as the collective voice for 36 hospitals across Northeast Ohio. More than a century since its founding in 1916, The Center continues the legacy of its founders by working collaboratively to increase the efficiency of healthcare delivery, providing insightful healthcare information to the public, and undertaking initiatives aimed at improving the health of the community.

Today, The Center's efforts focus on areas that benefit from a regional approach, which includes helping to improve the level of emergency preparedness in Northeast Ohio by working with area hospitals to increase their capacity and capability to respond to and recover from natural and man-made disasters. In addition, The Center's community health program empowers member hospitals to meet their community health goals and achieve equitable and improved health outcomes for all.

Supporting hospitals in their community health work is central to The Center's community health program. We seek to help our hospitals build strong partnerships and align their efforts with one another, public health departments, community stakeholders and community residents. We believe that by working together we will have a greater collective impact.

The Center recently co-led efforts with Dr. Heidi Gullett, Associate Professor of Family Medicine at Case Western Reserve University's School of Medicine and Cuyahoga County Board of Health Medical Director, to develop a collaborative Cuyahoga County Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA) that brought together Cuyahoga County hospitals, public health partners, community partners and community residents. Five health priorities were identified that will guide the work of the collaborative over the next three years:

- Eliminating Structural Racism
- Enhancing Trust and Trustworthiness
 - Between hospital, public health systems and residents
 - Between healthcare providers and patients
 - Between social service agencies, community stakeholders and hospitals

- Addressing Community Conditions such as Poverty and its Effects
- Enhancing Mental Health and Reducing Substance Abuse
- Reducing Chronic Illness and its Effects

Critical to this initiative has been working with trusted community partners to authentically engage with community residents. We learned that by partnering with community health workers we could achieve a deeper level of engagement and build trust with community residents. Working with A Vision of Change, we were able to deploy a survey in hard-to-reach communities to gain a more complete understanding of the health needs faced by community residents. This partnership was also instrumental in bringing community residents from disadvantaged communities to the table to help us identify the most pressing health needs that should be prioritized. We encourage the subcommittee to explore partnerships with trusted community partners, such as community health workers, to disseminate critical health messaging that communities of color need to know to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

In addition to our work in Cuyahoga County, The Center also leads the CHNA Roundtable, which was created in 2015 to spur opportunities for shared learning and collaboration in Northeast Ohio. Comprised of hospital members involved in CHNAs at their respective facilities, the CHNA Roundtable brings together regional stakeholders to share best practices, collaborate to address identified health needs, and maintain regulatory compliance.

A key outreach effort that the CHNA Roundtable recently supported was Celebrate Your Plate, a social marketing campaign that aimed to increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables among low-income Ohioans - spearheaded by the Ohio SNAP-Ed program supported by the State Nutrition Action Committee. Social marketing is an approach used to harness the power of marketing to influence behaviors that benefit communities and individuals for social good. This social marketing campaign was deployed across the state and lessons learned from that campaign may prove useful to the subcommittee's education and outreach efforts related to developing a statewide, culturally sensitive, outreach campaign.

Also related to outreach, The Center has been convening hospitals and federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) on a bi-weekly basis to share U.S. Census outreach efforts, learn from one another and receive regular updates from U.S. Census staff. Convening is one of the key roles The Center serves and we encourage the subcommittee to harness the power of hospital associations to help support your education and outreach efforts.

The Center for Health Affairs works with the Cuyahoga County Board of Health to manage and serve as the local site administrators for Healthy Northeast Ohio. This website, available at www.healthyneo.org, provides hospitals, public health departments, community-based organizations, philanthropic agencies, and other stakeholders with data and resources to support regional and community health improvement activities and strengthen collaboration in the region. Healthy Northeast Ohio currently partners with 17 organizations including hospitals and public health departments. We recommend using existing community health improvement websites, such as Healthy Northeast Ohio, to help promote and disseminate materials developed as part of the Minority Health Strike Force's work.

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought renewed attention and added urgency to the need to address the health disparities experienced by people of color. The Center applauds the work of this subcommittee and is committed to achieving equitable and improved health outcomes for all. We recently released a public statement supporting the City of Cleveland's declaration declaring racism a public health crisis.

Yet words alone are not enough to remedy 400 years of inequity. Action is needed. We stand firmly committed to taking concrete action steps to help address disparities in COVID-19 health outcomes by communities of color.

In summary, we recommend that the subcommittee consider the following:

- Explore partnerships with trusted community partners, such as community health workers, to disseminate critical health messaging that communities of color need to know to prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- Connect with the Ohio SNAP-Ed program supported by the State Nutrition Action Committee to understand key takeaways from the statewide social marketing campaign, Celebrate Your Plate, they developed.
- Harness the convening power of hospital associations to help support education and outreach efforts.
- Use existing community health improvement websites, such as Healthy Northeast Ohio, to help promote and disseminate materials developed as part of the Minority Health Strike Force's work.

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit written testimony and I welcome any opportunity to answer questions or offer additional information. I can be reached at kcraciun@chanet.org or 216.337.6056.