

# There's No Health Equity Without Racial Justice

A Success Story from the REACH Coalition Steering Committee



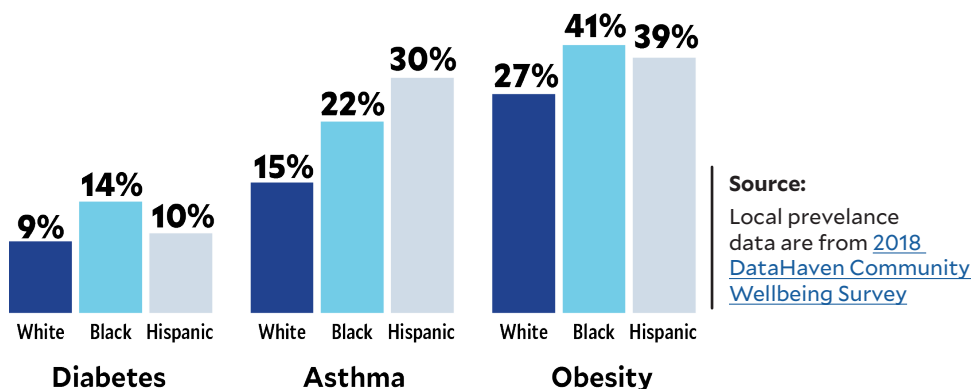
2021

## At a Glance

Many partners involved in the New Haven REACH Coalition have been focused on addressing health disparities for many years, and the Coalition has recently provided a venue to organize around the issues. The culmination of COVID-19 disparities seen across the United States and in New Haven, coupled with national civil unrest and the fight for racial justice, spurred the REACH Coalition Steering Committee to deepen its commitment to health justice and racial equity, with a focus on enacting policy change at the local level. The Steering Committee was instrumental in helping to pass a local resolution declaring Racism a Public Health Crisis and in developing a comprehensive set of recommendations focused on racism as a public health issue.

## Health in Context

In New Haven, residents are at higher risk for chronic disease and poorer health, compared to Connecticut and the United States. These health disparities are most striking in our low-income neighborhoods, which are predominately communities of color. Residents who are Black or Hispanic, and those who are living with an income below \$30k have a higher rate of chronic diseases.



## COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically underscored the effects of health disparities in Black and Brown communities across the United States, including in New Haven. In the face of this health crisis, the REACH Coalition Steering Committee deepened its commitment to health equity and demonstrated strength in pivoting to meet the rapidly changing priorities of the community.

## Timeline

- ▼ **March 8, 2020**  
First reported case of COVID-19 in Connecticut
- ▼ **July 6, 2020**  
New Haven declares racism a public health crisis & initiated the RAPHI working group
- ▼ **July 9, 2020**  
REACH Coalition Steering Committee writes Op-Ed on structural racism and COVID-19 published in the New Haven Register
- ▼ **September 2020**  
RAPHI working group is convened and REACH Coalition Steering Committee members hold four of eight seats
- ▼ **October 15, 2020**  
RAPHI holds virtual public hearing to gather ideas for recommendations
- ▼ **December 2020**  
RAPHI convened multiple times in December to discuss, draft, and finalize recommendations to submit to the New Haven Board of Alders
- ▼ **January 28, 2021**  
A public hearing was held to receive feedback from citizens on the recommendations
- ▼ **February 16, 2021**  
The recommendations were formally accepted by the Board of Alders
- ▼ **June 1, 2021**  
Connecticut declared Racism a Public Health Emergency



## REACH Coalition Steering Committee

At the outset of the pandemic, the Steering Committee wrote an [Op-Ed in the New Haven Register](#) about COVID-19 and health disparities, highlighting the local impact of structural racism on health equity and connecting the effects of these inequities to REACH priorities, such as the lack of access to healthy foods and safe spaces for physical activity.

The REACH Coalition Steering Committee also focused their work on local and state policy priorities related to health equity. Steering Committee members were instrumental in helping to pass a resolution declaring Racism as a Public Health Crisis by advocating to the New Haven Board of Alders (BOA). [The resolution was passed by the BOA](#) in July 2020. Led by REACH partner, Health Equity Solutions, the State of Connecticut General Assembly also passed a law in June 2021 that declared racism a public health emergency – with REACH Coalition members participating in advocacy by writing letters and calling state legislators.

When the BOA passed the resolution, they also created the Racism as a Public Health Issue (RAPHI) Working Group, charged with developing recommendations. The REACH Coalition Steering Committee advocated for seats on the working group and were granted four of the eight seats. In October 2020, the working group hosted a public hearing with over 40 participants and 20+ people providing testimony.

At the same time, the REACH Coalition Steering Committee had researched and selected policy priorities for its own work. Steering Committee members serving on the RAPHI Working Group advocated to incorporate these priorities as official recommendations, which ultimately served as the basis for the final report. The Steering Committee highlighted issues related to health

The RAPHI Working Group report included 49 specific recommendations under several categories:

- Institutional Commitment
- COVID-19 Response
- Health and Healthcare
- Mental Health
- Economic Security
- Housing
- Law Enforcement
- Food Insecurity
- Food Systems
- Transportation

To read the full report, visit [bit.ly/NHV-RAPHI](https://bit.ly/NHV-RAPHI)

equity, food systems, transportation, and social determinants of health – elevating the important work of the REACH national agenda. The RAPHI Working Group recommendations were submitted to the BOA Health and Human Services Committee. A public hearing was held before this committee on January 28, 2021 to receive feedback from citizens on the recommendations, before being formally accepted by the BOA.

### Next Steps

The REACH Coalition is continuing to advance its policy priorities, which intentionally overlap with the RAPHI recommendations. For example, one priority is to collaborate with Yale New Haven Hospital to foster an improved community-directed approach to their Community Health Needs Assessment and Improvement Plan processes. The REACH Coalition will also continue to monitor next steps and progress on the recommendations submitted to the Board of Alders.

## Contact Us!

If you would like to learn more information about the REACH Coalition Steering Committee, please email Alycia Santilli at [santillia1@southernct.edu](mailto:santillia1@southernct.edu). This project is funded by the CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program.



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