

Statement from MNACHC Board Chair, Kristi Halvarson and CEO, Jonathan Watson, on the Killing of George Floyd

The horrific police brutality that resulted in the killing of George Floyd affirms what our patients, staff and community board members have known for decades: long-term structural inequities, injustices, and racism have a devastating impact on black lives, Minnesota's communities of color, and indigenous populations.

Minnesota's Community Health Centers stand in steadfast support of our neighbors in the Twin Cities who have been directly impacted by the events of the past ten days. Our Community Health Center staff and patients are hurting, grieving, and upset.

Community Health Centers were born out of the Civil Rights and social justice movements of the 1960s. Community Health Centers were founded on the principle that all people need health care, regardless of who you are, how much you can afford, or where you come from to lead a successful life.

On Memorial Day 2020, on the corner of 38th Street and Chicago Avenue in Minneapolis, the unfulfilled promises of the civil rights movement as a nation and state became abundantly clear once again.

At Community Health Centers, every hour of every day, we see significant health disparities in the communities of color that we serve. Although only 76% of Community Health Center patients are from communities of color, they account for nearly 90% of the positive COVID-19 tests. Tragically, health disparities in Minnesota exceed nearly all other states. And these disparities extend far beyond health care to other social determinants of health such as the discriminatory practices in education, policing, and social mobility, among others.

For over five decades, Community Health Centers have cared for too many patients that have experienced significant trauma as a result of societal injustices such as racial profiling and police brutality. The killing of Mr. Floyd on a Minneapolis street—mere city blocks from six Minneapolis Community Health Centers—adds yet another layer to this chronic trauma and requires a response on par with any other chronic disease or illness.

This trauma is a collective community mental health issue that requires a holistic response far greater than any other disease or illness. In addition, our neighborhoods are suffering from the additional trauma of physically and economically damaged neighborhoods. This damage compromises our neighbors' access to employment and basic goods ranging from groceries to life-saving medications.

NOW is the time to confront the harsh realities of racism and inequality that exist in Minnesota.

NOW is the time to heal our communities that have suffered this past week and for decades.

NOW is the time for Community Health Centers to advance the fight against the racism and social inequalities that birthed the need for Community Health Centers in the United States.

Community Health Centers were created for and by the communities they serve. Every day, we care for and fight for everyone in our neighborhoods. For fifty years our communities have directed us to help them address many health-related issues. Today they are loudly asking us to listen to them, to heal our communities and to act. If the last ten days do not spur us to action, we fear nothing will.

We are eager to work with leaders from all sectors—public, private, non-profit, the criminal justice system, philanthropy, and anyone with the potential to drive the change our communities rightfully demand. This work must address the historic and systemic racism in Minnesota if we are to be successful.

Our vision continues to be that every Minnesotan, regardless of race or ethnicity, has the opportunity to lead a happy, healthy, and productive life.

We stand for equity and justice for all.