Racism Is a Public Health Crisis
Spectrum Health's Pledge to Act

The mission of Spectrum Health is to improve health, inspire hope and save lives. To most effectively fulfill this mission, we acknowledge that structural racism has harmed the people and communities we serve. Structural racism operates within and among the many systems that comprise our society in ways that are both synergistic and mutually reinforcing. We acknowledge that addressing racism requires remedies based on honest reflection, authentic collaboration and hard work, and compels us to think and act in ways that will stretch and challenge us. At Spectrum Health, we pledge to take on the challenge to eliminate racism and its impacts on **health**, **hope** and **lives**, both within our organization and in the communities we serve.

To this end, at Spectrum Health, we commit to an anti-racist strategy that amplifies and expands existing efforts, while also launching new actions.

Existing efforts include, but are not limited to:

- Foster an organizational culture that is diverse and inclusive, and improves the care and services provided to our patients, members and communities by deepening our existing commitment to the #123forEquity Pledge, which calls us to increase our **(i)** Cultural Competency; **(ii)** Supplier Diversity; **(iii)** Community Engagement; **(vi)** Equity of Care; and **(v)** Workforce Diversity.

- Continue to embrace our role as an Anchor Institution by leveraging our employment, procurement and investment practices to **(i)** hire locally and increase the diversity of our workforce; **(ii)** procure locally and diversify our supplier pool; and **(iii)** increase our investments in the communities we serve.

As we develop new efforts, we pledge to:

- **Conduct rigorous analyses of internal procedures, policies, practices and cultural norms of the organization** to unearth their effects on the social and economic conditions and health of team members and patients in communities of color, including analysis of health outcome data that is disaggregated by race and ethnicity. We will use findings to reform internal procedures, practices, policies and norms to create and sustain health equity.

- **Increase team member knowledge, skill and capacity**, through implicit bias training, anti-racism education, empathy exercises and other tools to identify structural and systemic forms of racism and address its impacts on health equity. We aim to do this at all levels of the organization, including executive leadership and governing boards.

- **Ensure that strategic priorities and associated tactics of Spectrum Health are regularly and systematically evaluated for their impacts on health equity among patients, members and the communities they come from** to eliminate differences in social, economic and health outcomes based on race and ethnicity.

- **Develop, implement and rigorously evaluate data-informed strategies to ensure health equity among patients, members and communities we serve.**

In addition to these prioritized actions, we pledge to:

- **Acknowledge** that health inequities are predominantly a function of:
  - Disparities in the social and economic resources required for good health (e.g., quality housing and education, nutritious food, accessible transportation, living wage jobs and just public safety). Structural racism shapes the distribution of these resources in ways that systematically create and sustain the health inequities experienced by communities of color.
  - Institutional policies, processes and practices, supported and perpetuated by implicit biases, that influence negative perceptions and actions toward an individual or group (e.g., staff and/ or health care provider bias toward or against certain patients or members).

- **Listen** to individuals and communities who have been harmed by racism. Acknowledge the harm selflessly, and without guilt or judgment; and serve as their allies, advocates and partners seeking to root out racism and mitigate its effects.

- **Act** on what is learned through listening by authentically engaging with communities impacted by racism. Engage through equitable sharing of decision-making authority in the development (including the establishment of goals and objectives), execution and evaluation of strategies to narrow health inequities.

- **Advocate** for communities of color when the policies, procedures, practices and cultural norms of organizations and systems in areas such as education, housing, employment, food, transportation and public safety, harm and shorten their lives.

- **Acknowledge** that anti-racism work requires a long-term and sustained commitment that extends well past the current crises. This work requires: intentional allocation of financial, human, technology and other resources; partnerships with other community institutions; new and reformed policies, procedures, processes and cultural norms; and an accountability system, with clear performance metrics, to ensure progress toward the goal of achieving health equity.

This work calls for us to listen deeply to and engage authentically with those communities most impacted by health inequities. This work also calls for us to live our values by exhibiting compassion through deep caring, authentically collaborating with existing and new partners, and navigating new territory with curiosity and courage.

The Journey Before Us

In the days, months and years to come, the communities of color we serve will have great challenges in efforts to rebound in the wake of the current health, social and economic crises. The health and economic inequities amplified by COVID-19 will persist and intensify as communities of color disproportionately experience prolonged and permanent job loss, evictions and homelessness, food insecurity and hunger, educational shortfalls, and associated downward spirals of hopelessness, poor health (physical and mental) and shortened lives. Spectrum Health has the opportunity and the mission-driven imperative to help create an alternative future – one in which we live up to our mission to *improve health, inspire hope and save lives.*