

For Immediate Release: June 29, 2021

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PolicyLink

“Decentering Whiteness” is Critical to Improving Health, Well-Being, and Economic Security for All Communities, New Report Finds

Advancing Well-Being by Transcending the Barriers of Whiteness details origins and harms of racialized national politics, calls for narrative and policy change that centers most marginalized

OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA -- Today, PolicyLink and Well Being Trust released a new report, [*Advancing Well-Being by Transcending the Barriers of Whiteness*](#), that highlights how addressing racism at personal, systemic and structural levels is critical to equitable health and well-being for all. Since America’s founding, structural racism has created disparate health and economic conditions for people of color across the nation, and these very conditions are now increasing rates of illness and deaths of despair — including substance abuse and suicide — among White people as well. The report details how the challenges confronting White working-class populations today could be more effectively addressed if structural and institutional racism had been confronted at the necessary fundamental level decades earlier.

Advancing Well-Being by Transcending the Barriers of Whiteness provides a narrative and policy roadmap to better address the root causes of today’s social and economic crises, and demonstrate how centering the most marginalized results in better outcomes for all communities.

“Our democracy is an experiment, and for it to remain healthy, we must be persistent in perfecting it. Perfecting it requires designing it for all people in America — particularly those who face the burdens of structural racism,” said **Michael McAfee, President and CEO, PolicyLink**.

“This is an invitation into a conversation of significance. This is a dialogue on which the future of the American people, the health of our democracy, the fairness of our economy, and the security of our nation rests,” said **Tyler Norris, CEO, Well Being Trust**.

Transcending whiteness and racialized politics

Today’s economic, political, and judicial systems devalue the lives of people of color and Indigenous people in ways that have prevented progress for White people, too. Over the last

several decades, health and opportunity gaps have widened across the board: maternal mortality, child mortality, education attainment, health, wealth, incarceration, homeownership and more.

When white identity is the implicit standard of normalcy and entitlement to the rewards of society, this leads to the marginalization, “othering,” and, too often, dehumanization of those who are not white. This has had direct and persistent consequences for many elements of public life, including education, housing, employment and business, and the criminal-legal system.

A new approach to equitable health and well-being for all must include the following policy changes:

- Alternatives to policing in responding to mental health crises.
- Rational, care-driven response to substance use.
- Access to home ownership through equitable (not predatory) lending.
- Equitable access to high-quality education and workforce development.

Constructing a new narrative for change

Discrete improvements in the policies that shape the nation’s economic security, health, and well-being can be achieved, but a larger and multifaceted strategy is needed for more widespread change.

The report outlines how America will need to come together to develop a new shared narrative of race and class that identifies the root causes of diseases and deaths of despair. Advancing innovative policy changes across the nation’s framework — from education and health to economics and the criminal-legal system — will benefit the most oppressed by the system today and ultimately lead to better health and well-being outcomes for all.

These are the actions needed to create a narrative that enables systemic change:

- Make clear there are common causes and experiences of economic disenfranchisement between White and Black low-income workers. Contemporary capitalism relentlessly sheds jobs and disinvests in places — and this is harmful for all of us.
- Make the case for how social and economic policies initially intended to support the most vulnerable can also benefit many other groups and improve societal wellbeing.
- Present “centering Blackness” — policies and practices that intentionally uplift and protect Black people — as an alternative to opinions, attitudes, and beliefs that center whiteness. Centering Blackness will promote collective healing and better outcomes for people of all races.
- Raise public expectations of government as a force for solving significant economic and social problems.

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PolicyLink is a national research and action institute advancing racial and economic equity by *Lifting Up What Works*[®]. Our mission is to ensure all people in America—particularly those who face the burdens of structural racism—can participate in a just society, live in a healthy community of opportunity, and prosper in an equitable economy. Our guiding ethos is Equity—the just and fair inclusion into a society in which all of us can participate, prosper, and reach our full potential.

Well Being Trust is a national foundation dedicated to advancing the mental, social, and spiritual health of the nation. Created to include participation from organizations across sectors and perspectives, Well Being Trust is committed to innovating and addressing the most critical mental health challenges facing America, and to transforming individual and community well-being. www.wellbeingtrust.org. Twitter: @WellBeingTrust