

Promoting Health Equity

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Quote of the Month

“True justice requires that we come to terms with the fact that Black Americans are treated differently, every day. And it requires us to do the sometimes thankless, often difficult, but always necessary work of making the America we know more like the America we believe in.”

— Statement by Barack Obama, April 20, 2021

In the News: Media Statement from CDC Director Rochelle P. Walensky on Racism and Health

Racism is a Serious Threat to the Public’s Health

CDC, April 8, 2021

Rochelle P. Walensky MD, MPH, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) declared racism a serious public health threat. She highlighted several new efforts CDC is leading to accelerate its work to address racism as a fundamental driver of racial and ethnic health inequities in the United States. She unveiled a new website “Racism and Health” that will serve as a hub for the agency’s efforts and a catalyst for greater education and dialogue around these critical issues.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the death of over 500,000 Americans. Tens of millions have been infected. And across this country people are suffering. Importantly, these painful experiences and the impact of COVID-19 are felt, most severely, in communities of color—communities that have experienced disproportionate case counts and deaths, and where the social impact of the pandemic has been most extreme. Yet, the disparities seen over the past year were not a result of COVID-19. Instead, the pandemic illuminated inequities that have existed for generations and revealed for all of America a known, but often unaddressed, epidemic impacting public health: racism.

What we know is this: racism is a serious public health threat that directly affects the well-being of millions of Americans. As a result, it affects the health of our entire nation. Racism is not just the discrimination against one group based on the color of their skin or their race or ethnicity, but the structural barriers that impact racial and ethnic groups differently to influence where a person lives, where they work, where their children play, and where they worship and gather in community. These social determinants of health have life-long negative effects on the mental and physical health of individuals in communities of color. Over generations, these structural inequities have resulted in stark racial and ethnic health disparities that are severe, far-reaching and unacceptable.

Confronting the impact of racism will not be easy. I know that we can meet this challenge. I know that we can create an America where all people have the opportunity to live a healthy life when we each take responsibility and work together. I am committed to this work. I certainly hope you will lean in and join me.”

Learn more:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

[Media Statement](#), April 8, 2021

[Racism and Health website](#)

May is Mental Health Awareness Month



Each year millions of Americans face the reality of living with a mental illness. And this year, more people than ever before are dealing with emotional challenges associated with the pandemic and the social upheaval experienced across our country. These stressors have amplified the need for public awareness and discussion of mental health as a key component of overall health. So, in conjunction with the national “May is Mental Health Awareness Month”, Ventura County Behavioral Health has launched a new countywide campaign, “I’m Talking About My Mental Health.”

This campaign was developed with de-stigmatization as a critical goal. By showing relatable people facing relatable challenges, reaching out for help and making positive changes in their lifestyles, we make the goal of improved mental health feel approachable and achievable.

By personalizing the message - talking about “my” mental health - the campaign allows viewers to see others talking about, thinking about, and working on their mental health and fitness, and demonstrates this as normal and life-affirming behavior.

There are now billboards and posters in the community, public service announcements on the radio, and colleagues inviting discussion by wearing buttons or even using the themed Zoom background.

Please take a minute to get familiar with the campaign, and join us in promoting the discussion of mental health in the weeks ahead.

Learn more:

I’m Talking About My Mental Health

www.talkingaboutmymentalhealth.org



Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders (AAPI) both have a rich heritage thousands of years old that have shaped the history of the United States. This year, during Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month, the HHS Office of Minority Health (OMH) will focus on supporting communities that have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic by continuing to promote vaccine confidence and addressing the recent rise in violence against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in the U.S.

OMH is urging state, tribal, and local leaders, community-based organizations, faith leaders, healthcare providers and individuals to leverage their communication channels and social media platforms to not only celebrate the achievements and contributions of AAPIs in the U.S., but to also encourage AAPI communities to prioritize their mental and emotional wellness in the current state of racism and intolerance.

Learn more:

Office of Minority Health

[Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month](#)

The Office of Minority Health is dedicated to improving the health of racial and ethnic minority populations through the development of health policies and programs that will help eliminate health disparities.

Featured Resource: Expanding Broadband Access Could Address the Latino Digital Divide

Addressing the Digital Divide

About 19 million Americans lack access to broadband services. Of those 19 million, the majority are in low-income

and rural communities and communities of color. This “digital divide” is problematic, especially as students and families have needed to rely on the internet for online learning and telehealth during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Businesses and the federal government are stepping up to help these areas by expanding broadband access. In his \$2.3 trillion infrastructure plan, President Joe Biden proposed expanding broadband services to low income, rural areas. Together, initiatives like these can help Latinos and other people of color get equitable access to online opportunities.

Learn more:

Salud America!

[Expanding Broadband Access Could Address the Latino Digital Divide](#)

Salud America! is a national Latino-focused organization that creates culturally relevant and research-based stories and tools to inspire people to drive healthy changes to policies, systems, and environments for Latino children and families.

Driver of Change: Interview with Teresa Telles

Inspiring Youth



Every issue we feature stories of individuals and agencies that are making a difference in their communities during this time of COVID-19. Today we are talking with Teresa Telles, Youth Safety Coordinator, Oxnard Police Department and Coordinator of Work-Based Learning, Career Education Department, Oxnard Union High

Teresa oversees the California Violence Intervention Prevention grant for the Oxnard Police Department. The grant helps to improve public health and safety by supporting effective violence reduction initiatives in communities that are disproportionately impacted by violence. As the Coordinator of Work-Based Learning at the Oxnard Union High School District, she helps students learn skills and career knowledge.

How did you get interested in working with at-risk youth?

Teresa: I grew up in Oxnard and Port Hueneme. I was an at-risk youth growing up and got involved with drugs, joined a gang, and got pregnant at age 16. I went back to school and because of programs and support, I was encouraged to get my high school diploma. I always wanted to give back and got involved with working with at-risk youth 14 years ago with Oxnard Union High School District and the Oxnard Police Department.

At OPD I help coordinate meetings in the juvenile facility to provide resources for youth being released and to help motivate them to make better choices. I coordinate monthly meetings to share resources from agencies throughout Ventura County. The grant has helped provide services to hundreds of youth in the city of Oxnard and Port Hueneme with youth employment, leadership skills, counseling and job readiness skills.

At OUHSD I coordinate industry sector meetings to help teachers, students and our department learn about trends in our county. I assist teachers in our district with work based learning needs such as, guest speakers, job shadows, work site tours, internships and more. I coordinate career related events such as STEAM Day, Career Fairs, and Career Education Showcase. I outreach to middle schools in each of our districts to help incoming 9th grade families to become familiar with the OUHSD career programs. During COVID-19 classroom activities and services turned to virtual meetings.

What is your passion for working in the community?

Teresa: I was born and raised here and I want to help youth succeed, especially those that struggle like I did. I am a product of programs and people that encouraged me. I mentor youth because I can help them to succeed.

How are you addressing issues of Health Equity in your work and your community?

Teresa: The program at OUHSD helps youth with social and economic disadvantages get college and career ready. As the Youth Safety Coordinator with the Oxnard Police Department, I go to Juvenile Hall to talk to youth and encourage them to make better choices.

What are the areas that you hope to make changes in?

Teresa: I hope to help reduce gang and drug involvement in

youth. I can work with youth, monitor their progress, and help them on a personal basis to make positive choices.

Tell us one thing about you that helps us get to know you better?

Teresa: It is important to have positive people around you and mentors that help to change direction. I would like to encourage people that it's the way you respond to struggles that helps make you stronger and to help others by sharing your story and making a difference.

Thank you Teresa for sharing your experience with us. You are an inspiring Driver of Change!



In the News: Addiction Should Be Treated, Not Penalized

Moving Toward A Public Health Approach

Health Affairs Blog, April 27, 2021

Nora D. Volkow, M.D., Director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has been instrumental in demonstrating that drug addiction is a disease of the human brain. As a research psychiatrist and scientist, she has pioneered the use of brain imaging to investigate the toxic effects and addictive properties of abusable drugs. Dr. Nora Volkow makes the evidence-based case on how drug criminalization disproportionately harms Black communities and exacerbates health disparities.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the large racial health disparities in the United States. Black Americans have experienced worse outcomes during the pandemic, continue to die at a greater rate than White Americans, and also suffer disproportionately from a wide range of other acute and chronic illnesses. These disparities are particularly stark in the field of substance use and substance use disorders, where entrenched punitive approaches have exacerbated stigma and made it hard to implement appropriate medical care. Abundant data show that Black people and other communities of color have been disproportionately harmed by decades of addressing drug use as a

crime rather than as a matter of public health.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse is redoubling its focus on vulnerabilities and progression of substance use and addiction in minority populations. We are exploring research partnerships with state and local agencies and private health systems to develop ways to eliminate systemic barriers to addiction care. We are also funding research on the effects of alternative models of regulating and decriminalizing drugs in parts of the world where such natural experiments are already occurring.

People with substance use disorders need treatment, not punishment, and drug use disorders should be approached with a demand for high-quality care and with compassion for those affected. With a will to achieve racial equity in delivering compassionate treatment and the ability to use science to guide us toward more equitable models of addressing addiction, I believe such a goal is achievable.

Learn more:

[Health Affairs Blog, Addiction Should Be Treated, Not Penalized](#), Nora D. Volkow, NIDA, April 27, 2021

[National Institute on Drug Abuse \(NIDA\)](#)

Upcoming Events

We will keep you posted on upcoming events in each newsletter. If your agency is planning any online meetings, please send us the information so we can post it.

Protect Your Brain: Addressing Adolescent African American Males and Substance Use

June 9, 12:00 PM, PT

NAADAC

[Register](#)

Nominate a Driver of Change

Share your Stories

You may nominate a community member or colleague for recognition for exemplary work in the community to help build healthier communities and address health equity. Go to the website and nominate someone or yourself!



We would love to hear your stories of community change, what inspired you, and how you are making a

difference.

Learn more:

Social Determinants of Health, Drivers of Change

www.healthequityvc.org/drivers-of-change

Stay Connected

If you are looking for resources in the community, check out our websites. We continually add news, tips, latest research, blogs, publications and more.

Social Determinants of Health

The Social Determinants of Health website provides resources, news, and features community agencies or “Drivers of Change” who are working to building healthier communities through individual, organizational and community wide effort and engagement.

www.healthequityvc.org

Ventura County Limits

This website is a portal to help learn about our efforts to address substance use challenges in our communities.

www.venturacountylimits.org

Ventura County Behavioral Health

The Ventura County Behavioral Health Department (VCBH) provides mental health and substance use treatment services. Learn about our services and how to access help.

vcbh.org

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STAY CONNECTED

