



**Addressing Racial Equity
within
Behavioral Health Organizations**

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“The ultimate measure of a person is not where one stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where one stands in times of challenge and controversy.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

A Pandemic within a Pandemic

With over 7 million COVID-19 cases and nearly 210,000 deaths in the U.S.; and approximately 718,000 cases and over 14,000 deaths in Florida, the pandemic has disrupted our lives. Children, youth, and families are adjusting to sheltering in place, altered school scheduling, changes in routines, job losses, death, and grieving alone, deviating from our deep-rooted cultural and spiritual traditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified existing health disparities in health care access and utilization. This unprecedented disruption has been compounded by the deaths of unarmed African Americans; Ahmaud Arbery in Brunswick, GA, Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, George Floyd in Minneapolis, and others by law enforcement and community members. The deaths of these individuals have led to an international human rights and anti-racism response. How do we move from tragedy to transformative outcomes in our homes, schools, institutions, organizations, and systems?

This is our moment, to embrace a movement of anti-racism and social change. Anti-racism refers to an intentional and deliberate effort to dismantle racial hierarchy, power, and privilege; eliminating neutrality; and making an active commitment to dismantling structures that perpetuate systemic racism. The individual, organizational, and systems level work of anti-racism involves three active words: 1) Acknowledgement; 2) Affirmation; and 3) Atonement.

Anti-racism and equity work require:

Acknowledgement

Communities must acknowledge the historical and current oppression of Indigenous populations, African Americans, and other marginalized groups. This requires a relearning of history and a rewriting of narratives that fail to acknowledge the social, political, economic, physical, emotional, and mental impact of interpersonal, internalized, and systemic racism within communities of color.

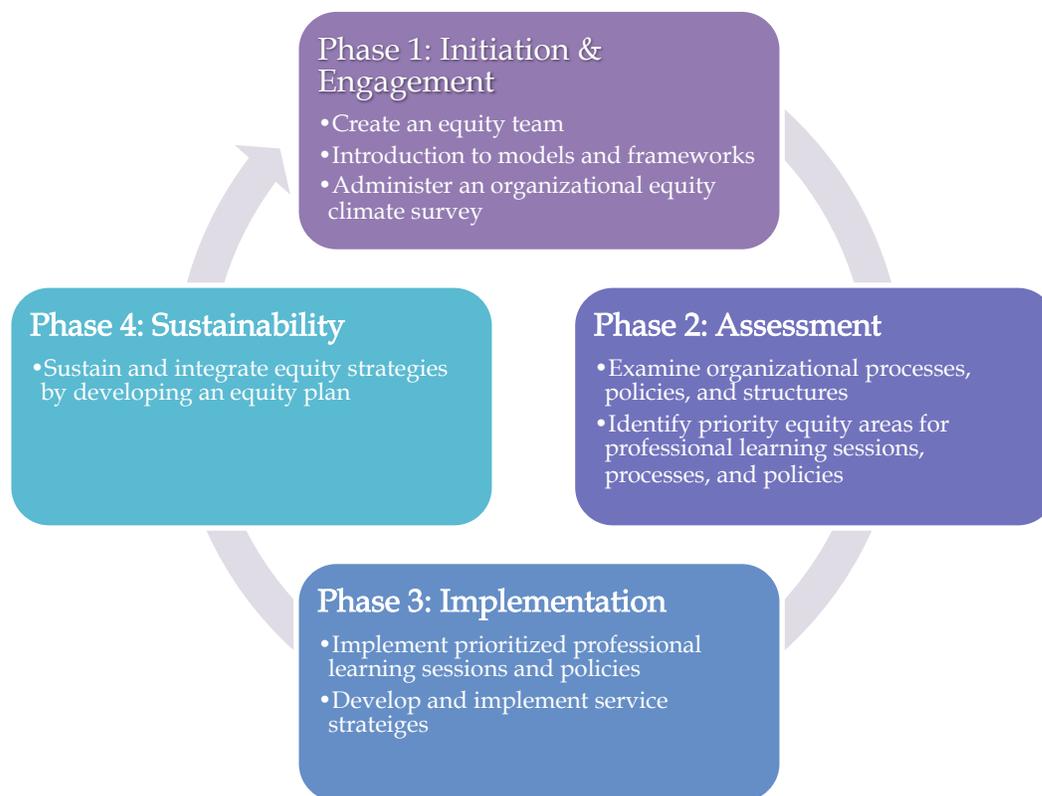
Affirmation

Anti-racism requires that we affirm the worth and dignity of all children, youth, and families, and view all people as equals regardless of their cultural background. The anti-racism movement requires a dismantling of white supremacy and superiority complexes. Racism must be named and rooted out individually and across organizations and systems.

Atonement

Atonement requires that amends be made. Harmony, oneness, and racial healing will only occur after there is justice. In the words of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Justice must be pursued relentlessly. This means that we must speak up in our homes, organizations, and institutions and examine ourselves, our intent and impact, our privilege and power. It also means that we must examine and unpack policies, processes, and structures that continue to perpetuate inequities.

Using a racial equity and anti-oppression lens, behavioral health organizations must address biases and organizational policies, processes, and structures. Behavioral health organizations’ approach must be long-term and in phases emphasizing: 1) assessment; 2) professional learning; 3) community engagement ; 4) strategic planning; 5) analysis of organizational policies and procedures using the National Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) Standards as a framework as well as other multicultural tools such as the *Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization*, and 6) the development of an equity plan. https://philanos.org/resources/Documents/Conference%202020/Pre-Read%20PDFs/Continuum_AntiRacist.pdf



Phase 1: Initiation and Engagement

- Convene an **equity committee** comprised of diverse and inclusive leaders, staff, parents/caregivers, youth, and community leaders to guide equity assessment, implementation, and evaluation.
- Administer a **racial equity climate assessment** to gauge perceptions, beliefs, and next steps in creating an anti-racist, affirming, and multicultural organization. The racial equity assessment will provide insights on leaders’ and staff’s racial equity perceptions, beliefs, knowledge, and training/supports needed to create an affirming workspace. The assessment focuses the racial equity work and creates organizational accountability. The assessment may also include focus groups and interviews
- Prioritize **professional learning sessions** about relevant topics related to cultural humility, cultural competence, racial trauma, cross-cultural communication, microaggressions, ethnic identity development, racial socialization, systematic racism, the National CLAS Standards; and other topics identified by the survey.

Phase 2: Assessment

- Conduct an **in-depth organizational assessment** of policies, processes, and structures using an organizational equity assessment tool. The assessment tool may consist of both qualitative and quantitative components with a web-based survey and focus groups and/or interviews with ELC leaders, staff, governance, parents/caregivers, youth, and community members. i.e. Listening circles, forums, town hall meetings etc.
- Use **assessment results** to guide and prioritize organizational equity strategies.

Phase 3: Implementation

- Facilitate **professional learning sessions** with organizational leaders, governance, and staff. Family and youth educational sessions should be considered as well.
- Plan and implement **organizational equity changes and strategies**.

Phase 4: Evaluation

- To sustain equity and anti-racism work, create an **equity plan** to be integrated in organization's overall strategic plan based on the National CLAS Standards and other domains.

The Voices Institute, LLC is a training, research, and health education group focused on health equity, cultural humility, and wholistic well-being. With over 20 years of community health and health equity professional learning and research experience, the Voices Institute, offers authentic and relevant sessions that prompt self-reflection and organizational change. Please contact us at selena@voicesinst.org for additional information.

Behavioral Health Equity Resources

Connecting Children and Families to Care Behavioral Health Equity Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) Development

<https://www.plan4children.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CLAS-Toolkit-Updated-FINAL-for-web-lower-res-1.pdf>

Child Health and Institute of Connecticut, Inc. Providing Culturally Responsive Mental Health Care to Families Issue Brief

<https://www.chdi.org/publications/issue-briefs/providing-culturally-responsive-mental-health-care-families-role-national-clas-standards-reducing-health-disparities>

An Implementation Checklist for the National CLAS Standards

<https://thinkculturalhealth.hhs.gov/assets/pdfs/AnImplementationChecklistfortheNationalCLASStandards.pdf>

California Reducing Disparities Project: Strategic Plan to Reduce Mental Health Disparities

https://cpehn.org/sites/default/files/crdp_executive_summary_english.pdf

Alliance One Sample Equity Plans

<https://www.alliance1.org//web/resources/pubs/sample-equity-diversity-inclusion-plans.aspx>

Forward Through Ferguson Equity Plan

<https://forwardthroughferguson.org/report/executive-summary/clarifying-our-terms/>

San Mateo County Health System

<https://www.smchealth.org/sites/main/files/file-attachments/4.pdf?1515089736>