

Howard County Council Racial Equity Task Force



Public Health and Environmental Policy

The Public Health and Environmental Policy subgroup has been evaluating matters of public health, sustainability, and the built environment in Howard County as it pertains to advancing racial equity. This work has included reviewing pertinent data, evaluating public health disparities, and analyzing environmental practices in Howard County. Although public health and environmental policy are broad areas with racial equity implications, our subgroup identified the following priority themes: Maternal Health, Mental Health, Public Health Infrastructure, and Environmental Justice. The subgroup recommendations to the County Council are described below.

PUBLIC HEALTH

General Public Health Recommendations

Recommendation 1: We recommend the Howard County Council issue a resolution to establish a Howard County-based program, modeled after the [Montgomery County Cares](#) program, that provides basic medical services to uninsured adults of Howard County. The program would offer annual medical check-ups by a healthcare provider, sick visits by a healthcare provider, medications, lab tests, x-rays, access to specialists, oral health care, and other health programs.

Intent Behind Recommendation: Health is a fundamental human right. All Howard County residents have a right to basic medical services. However, immigration status and low income prevent some Howard County residents from obtaining health insurance. The proposed program is not health insurance but rather a group of community-based health care providers that will provide medical care to uninsured adults in the county.

Racial Equity Impact: Lack of access to healthcare is a structural determinant of health that disproportionately affects racial and ethnic minority groups. Providing affordable medical services to uninsured adults in Howard County will ensure that all residents have access to preventative and diagnostic healthcare services and timely treatment of diseases.

Data that Support Recommendation: According to the 2019 American Community Survey¹, approximately 3.9% of Howard County residents are uninsured, which is lower than the proportion of the uninsured population in Maryland (6%) and the United States (9.2%). Black (5.5%) and Hispanic(10.0%) people are more likely to be uninsured than White(2.5%) or Asian residents(3.0%).² Furthermore, it is estimated that the COVID-19 pandemic's effects on the uninsured population will be felt disproportionately by communities of color.³ In 2019, Howard

¹ <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?q=0500000US24027>

² https://www.marylandhbe.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/COVID_Uninsured_Analysis_Report.pdf

³ https://www.marylandhbe.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/COVID_Uninsured_Analysis_Report.pdf

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County Community Health Needs Assessment, 29.4% of residents stated that access to insurance was a top social/environmental concern affecting their healthcare.⁴

Metrics to measure Impact: Percentage of uninsured Howard County residents by race and ethnicity.

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years): Short term.

Recommendation 2: We recommend the Howard County Council provides additional funding to the Howard County Health Department (HCHD) to hire additional public health staff and implement public health programs to reduce racial health disparities. The Council should secure additional state and federal funding to support racial equity work and recruit and retain public health staff in the HCHD. A more robust public health infrastructure in Howard County will allow the county to combat current and future epidemics and address underlying epidemics of diabetes, hypertension, and obesity. There is an urgent need to address the underinvestment and understaffing of HCHD and shift from the current episodic and crisis-driven funding model to a sustainable and consistent stream of funding for the HCHD. To reduce racial health disparities, the Council should prioritize the following policies:

- a. Pass policies to reduce disparities related to nutrition, food insecurity, and physical activity. For instance, pass a resolution asking the Office of Community Sustainability to assess the "health" of the County's Food System especially given the high levels of food insecurity observed during the pandemic.
- b. Partner with the Howard County Health Department, public and private entities to support community-based screenings and management of hypertension, diabetes, and obesity.
- c. Provide grants to support community-based organizations to create and offer health promotion programs to reduce chronic disease disparities in Howard County.
- d. Develop or (review and revise as needed) a Howard County plan for emergency preparedness that incorporates specific strategies to address the needs of and outreach to racial and ethnic minority populations in Howard County.
- e. Track data on racial health disparities in Howard County.

Intent Behind Recommendation: The HCHD bureaus and programs seek to make Howard County a community in which health equity and optimal wellness are accessible for all who live, work, and visit. The HCHD is charged with keeping residents of Howard County healthy by preventing the start and spread of outbreaks and diseases, promoting healthy behaviors, keeping the food and the physical environments safe, preparing and responding to disasters and emergencies, among others. Underinvestment in our local public health infrastructure makes Howard County vulnerable to outbreaks and diseases but also hampers our ability to contain epidemics and promote health. Failure to provide sufficient funding to the HCHD may

⁴ https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/howard_county_general_hospital/downloads/CommunityHealthNeedsAssessment_FY19.pdf

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contribute to unnecessary increases in health care utilization, which exceeds the cost of investing in prevention.

Racial Equity Impact: The COVID-19 pandemic is disproportionately affecting communities of color, such as Black and Hispanic communities, who also have a higher burden of chronic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity. These chronic conditions contribute to higher morbidity and mortality. Howard County has large populations of Black and Hispanic people. Increasing the budget of the HCHD will support the hiring of additional staff and the development of public health programs targeting chronic diseases in people of color to reduce health disparities.

Data that Supports Recommendation: Dr. Lisa Cooper, a Howard County resident and James F. Fries Professor of Medicine and Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of equity in health and health care at the Johns Hopkins University Schools of Medicine, Nursing, and Public Health provided written public testimony on March 4, 2021, that supports this recommendation. She stressed that "local government and private funders should support community-engaged, action-oriented research and program evaluations to identify the best approaches to build political will and support to address health disparities. This could include initiatives to implement community-based approaches to address the burden of chronic conditions such as hypertension, diabetes, and obesity; raise public awareness of the connections between social factors and health; build empathy and support for addressing inequities, and enhance the capacity of individuals and communities to actively participate in efforts to address inequities at all levels. "

Furthermore, Horizon Foundation provided written public testimony on May 6, 2021, that stresses the importance of prioritizing health in the County Budget. They noted that "While Howard County has always provided a larger local financial match for health department activities than required by state law, the state has been derelict in providing needed health department funding. For example, the state cut overall local health department funding from \$73 million in 2009 to \$37.3 million in 2011. The funding has since never recovered, significantly hampering health department efforts ever since."

Higher investment in public health reduces Medicare utilization⁵, and the areas with higher levels of poverty are more likely to benefit from public health initiatives⁶.

Metrics to measure Impact: The County Council operating budget that is allocated to the HCHD.

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years): Short-term

Recommendation 3: The County Council should create a Howard County COVID-19 task force to analyze the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and how Howard County's response may have contributed to racial and ethnic disparities.

⁵ Mays GP, Mamaril CB. Public health spending and Medicare resource use: a longitudinal analysis of US communities. Health Serv Res. 2017;52 Suppl 2(Suppl 2):2357-2377.

⁶ Danaei G, Rimm EB, Oza S, Kulkarni SC, Murray CJL, Ezzati M. The promise of prevention: the effects of four preventable risk factors on national life expectancy and life expectancy disparities by race and county in the United States. PLoS medicine. 2010;7(3):e1000248-e1000248.

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Intent Behind Recommendation: Hundreds of Howard County residents have died from COVID-19, and many more have suffered from the devastating impact of the pandemic. A Howard County COVID-19 commission that investigates the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on racial and ethnic minorities in the county and the public health successes and shortcomings will prepare the county for a more resilient future. The commission should include epidemiologists, public health professionals, clinicians, virologists, residents, among others.

Racial Equity Impact: Understanding the toll of the pandemic on racial and ethnic minority groups who have suffered disproportionately will help the county preserve the lessons of the county's response to the COVID-19 crisis and prepare for a safer future for all residents.

Data that Supports Recommendation: A national [COVID-19 Commission Planning Group](#) has been established to study the national response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A local commission to understand the public health response will inform the national planning group and permit the discovery of lessons and solutions that are specific to Howard County.

Metrics to measure Impact: Time to the establishment of the Howard County COVID-19 Commission.

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years): Short-term, in the next month.

Maternal Health

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the County Council should create, by law, a Maternity Partnership Program/Prenatal Care Program, similar to Montgomery County's [Maternity Partnership Program](#) that would subsidize the cost of healthcare for uninsured mothers in collaboration with Howard County General Hospital (HCGH) and funded by the Howard County budget. Furthermore, the County Council should also accomplish the following:

1. Direct funds to Chase Brexton Health Care to enhance the sustainability of prenatal and maternal health services to reduce disparities for racial and ethnic minority women.
2. Create a designated Coordinator position in Howard County Health Department (HCHD) leadership to coordinate maternal health priorities and partnerships between entities such as Howard County Council, Howard County General Hospital (HCGH), St. Agnes Hospital, Chase Brexton Health Care, The Horizon Foundation, Payors to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in maternal health outcomes.
3. Fund the hiring and training of community-based doulas and midwives in Howard County to improve maternal health outcomes among Black women.

Intent Behind Recommendation: Maternal mortality is a key indicator of population health in Howard County, Maryland, and the United States. It signals the health and wellbeing of Howard

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County's women, children, and families and the investment in public health. Maternal health disparities in the United States are well-documented. Adverse social determinants, including lack of healthcare, low socioeconomic status, and immigration status, contribute to health disparities in women of color and particularly immigrant women.

Racial Equity Impact: A Howard County Maternity Partnership program would provide outpatient perinatal care and related services in order to improve pregnancy outcomes for uninsured, low-income mothers, who are more likely to be racial and ethnic minorities and their newborn children.

Data that Support Recommendation: Maternal health disparities in the United States are an urgent public health issue. According to a [2019 Maryland Maternal Mortality Review](#), Non-Hispanic(NH) Black women in Maryland are more likely to die from pregnancy-related deaths than Non-Hispanic White women. Non-Hispanic Black and Hispanic women are more likely to die from pregnancy-induced hypertension. There are persistent health insurance coverage disparities in the United States, with 24.4% of Hispanic new mothers, 12.1% for Black new mothers, and 7.0% for White new mothers.⁷ According to the 2019 Howard County Health Department Community Health Indicators Report Card, 9.1 % of NH Black and 10.7% of Hispanic women received late or no prenatal care compared to 4.2% of NH White and 4.7% of Asian women.⁸ There is also evidence of striking disparities in social determinants, which are the root causes of health disparities. In Howard County, NH Black mothers and Hispanic mothers are more likely to be unmarried, have lower education, receive late or no prenatal care, and less likely to start prenatal care in the first trimester than NH White mothers.⁹

Metrics to measure Impact: Number of uninsured women who participate in the program. Data on maternal health by race/ethnicity and nativity status(US-born vs. foreign-born). Reduce or eliminate the lack of early prenatal care in uninsured women of color. Maternal morbidity and mortality in women of color.

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years):

Short term: support the establishment of prenatal care service via Chase Brexton Health Care

Long Term: Creation of a Howard County Maternity Partnership Program, similar to

Montgomery County's Maternity Partnership Program

Mental Health Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Working with the County Executive, include extra funds in the education budget, we recommend the Howard County Council expand mental health and counseling services to all children in the Howard County Public School system.

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https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/100693/racial_disparities_in_uninsurance_among_new_mothers_following_the_affordable_care_act_0.pdf

⁸ [Howard County Health Department Community Health Indicators Report Card](#)

⁹ [Howard County Health Department Community Health Indicators Report Card](#)

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Intent Behind Recommendation: The recommendation will provide support to Black/African American students who are marginalized in the Howard County Public School System. By establishing relationships with community mental health providers and expanding counseling services, Black/African American Students will have an outlet to discuss challenges as well as receive support.

Racial Equity Impact: Black and African American students are disproportionately suspended from the Howard County Public School System, which may be indicative of disparities in the detection and treatment of mental health in minority children. Failure to detect and untreated mental health issues may result in Black and African American students being less likely to complete high school and other socioeconomic disadvantages in later life.

Data that Support Recommendation: There were 79,306 total suspensions in the 2019 school year. National Data: African Americans are 3.7 times more likely to be suspended in K-12 (ED and OCR).

Metrics to measure Impact: School suspensions by race and ethnicity in Howard County. Number of students by race and ethnicity who are suspended who receive mental health services.

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years): Short Term

Recommendation 2: We recommend the Howard County Council issue a resolution for the County government to partner with Howard Community College and other academic institutions to creating a pipeline of mental professionals and paraprofessionals that are bilingual and culturally competent to meet the needs of diverse populations in Howard County.

Intent Behind Recommendation: Providing culturally competent and linguistically congruent mental health services is imperative to provide quality care. This recommendation intends to foster a pipeline of mental health professionals who can meet the growing needs of diverse populations in Howard County, particularly Hispanics and Latinos.

Racial Equity Impact: There is a critical shortage of multilingual professionals and paraprofessionals within the mental health space in Howard County. Increasing the pipeline of mental health professionals who are culturally competent will address gaps in services that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minority populations in Howard County.

Data that Support Recommendation: Hispanic/Latino students had the highest reported percentage of students considering suicide at 21.9% (Maryland Department of Health, 2016). 13.8% of students reported that they made a plan about how they would attempt suicide in 2016, which was also up from 11.2% in 2014 (Maryland Department of Health, 2016).

As Howard County grows, it has become increasingly diverse. 57% of residents are White, followed by 19.5% Black and 18.9% Asian. Also, 20.8% of residents are foreign-born (United States Census Bureau, 2017). 25.2% of the population speaks a language other than English at

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home (United States Census Bureau, 2017); the most common foreign languages in the county are Spanish, Korean, and Chinese (United States Census Bureau, 2015).

Metrics to measure Impact: Increase in the number of mental health professionals who are bilingual and culturally competent. A decline in suicide attempt rates in Howard County among racial and ethnic minority populations. The percentage of mental health professionals who are multilingual in Howard County.

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years): Short Term 0-2 years

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the Howard County Council issue a resolution for Howard County General Hospital to partner with outpatient mental health clinics to assist with the overflow of emergency room admissions and enhance the delivery of culturally competent and timely care.

Intent Behind Recommendation: To reduce the wait time for emergency room patients without insurance and/or patients with Medicaid insurance. The intent behind this recommendation is for Black and African American patients to be seen by a medical professional quicker, establish a therapeutic relationship with their mental health provider and reduce inpatient stay.

Racial Equity Impact: Reduce the racial disparity in the use of the emergency room for mental between Black/African American and White Howard County residents.

Data that Support Recommendation: Emergency department visits due to mental health conditions have steadily increased overall in Howard County from a rate of 2023.5 per 100,000 in 2008 to 3082.1 per 100,000 in 2017 (Maryland State Health Improvement Process, 2016). When stratifying by race/ethnicity, there is a disparity in NH Black residents with the highest rate at 4240.1 per 100,000, which is 1.8 times greater than Hispanic residents (2384.8 per 100,000) and 1.4 times greater than NH White residents (3091.8 per 100,000) (Maryland State Health Improvement Process)

Metrics to measure Impact: Increase in the number of outpatient mental health clinics. Reduction in the racial disparity in emergency department visits due to mental health conditions

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years): Short Term

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ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: We recommend the County Council pass a resolution to eliminate racial disparities in public health, the built environment, access to green space, and climate action planning built on a [Health in All Policies \(HiAP\)](#) approach. HiAP is a collaborative approach that integrates and articulates health considerations into policymaking across sectors to improve the health of all communities and people. It recognizes that health is created by a multitude of factors beyond healthcare and acknowledges how the built environment impacts health outcomes. Furthermore, the resolution requires the county to integrate effective public engagement in public health and environmental policy priorities and decision-making through use of evidence-based strategies to elevate residents of color's voices by, for example, going to community groups, organizations, and stores where residents of color live, play, shop, work and pray.

Intent Behind Recommendation: Promoting healthy built environments, which may include features like walking and biking paths, access to public transportation and full-service grocery stores, can improve physical and mental wellbeing. Poor community design (e.g., car-centric with limited recreational spaces) may encourage sedentary habits and exacerbate public health problems like obesity, diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and depression (CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/policy/hiap/index.html>). A county-wide racial equity commitment built on HiAP would help nudge the county to foster even more of the good and remediate more of the bad. Requiring meaningful involvement from residents of color in setting priorities and planning serves to democratize planning processes and act as a counterbalance to the unfortunate current underrepresentation of people of color on County boards and commissions related to environmental planning.

Racial Equity Impact: The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the use of the HiAP approach to eliminate disparities in health and built environment and representation is a long held principle in a healthy democracy.

Data that Support Recommendation: Taken together, the public written testimony cited under "General Public Health Recommendations, Recommendation 2" provided by Dr. Lisa Cooper, a Howard County resident and James F. Fries Professor of Medicine and Bloomberg Distinguished Professor of equity in health and health care at the Johns Hopkins University Schools of Medicine, Nursing, and Public Health on March 4, 2021 and the testimony Tim Lattimer, Chair of the Columbia Association, Climate Change and Sustainability Advisory Committee submitted to the same public hearing on Environmental Justice support this recommendation. Lattimer wrote: "Communities of color & other marginalized groups often face

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unequal burdens of climate and environmental risks. Climate change is a threat to everyone's health & safety; but socially and economically disadvantaged groups face the greatest risks. ... As a consequence, marginalized communities typically have higher rates of health conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD). ...Solving racial and economic inequities is vital to overcoming climate and environmental crises. This means advancing environmental justice, (where) ...no group of people should bear a disproportionate share of the negative environmental consequences resulting from short-sighted land use policies and/or industrial, governmental, and commercial operations. (and) ... people have an opportunity to participate in decisions about activities that may affect their environment and/or health; The public's contribution can influence a decision-making body's decision; Community concerns will be considered in the decision-making process; and, Decision makers will seek out and facilitate the involvement of those potentially affected."

The Chinese American Parent Association of Howard County (CAPA-HC), Howard County Chinese School, Coalition for EDU and other community groups also submitted testimony to both public hearings calling for county commitment to meaningful and accommodating resident involvement.

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years): Short-term, within 4-6 months

Immediate enhancement to resilience infrastructure

Recommendation 2: We recommend the Howard County Council adopt legislation requiring the Howard County government to:

- Track and publish data on disparities in community level climate resilience and food sovereignty by race, ethnicity and other factors.
- Amend the 2030 Howard County Climate Action Plan legislation to require the Office of Sustainability integrate Climate Justice impact assessments and request the County Executive fund external technical support in doing so.
- Convene a workgroup in partnership with the Office of Community Sustainability and facilitated by a consultant to produce a report on evidence-based and sustainable funding strategies for community based Climate Justice and Food Sovereignty work like tree plantings, community food growing, farmers markets, energy insecurity (including cooling centers), green economy/workforce development and more.
- Adopt grant guidelines that require non-profit partners to use evidence-based strategies to engage lower-resourced neighborhoods and residents of color. Establish targeted universalism for grant allocation based on neighborhoods risk data (i.e. prioritize neighborhoods with disparities).

Intent Behind Recommendation: To enhance the county's Climate Justice/Food Sovereignty infrastructure, particularly data tools like HoCoDash and the Green Infrastructure Network, and thereby its capacity to track and assess any adverse impacts of its current policies regarding the built environment, green infrastructure, climate action, and food on residents and communities of color's health and wellbeing. The recommendation also aims to boost the County's, and local partners', laudable nascent efforts to assess and address racial equity in Climate Justice and Food Sovereignty.

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Racial Equity Impact: Concrete data on, and mapping of, inequities as well as mechanisms for routine assessment of equity impacts in government planning not only clarifies equity goals for staff and local partners but motivates positive action to close disparities. ([Godsil et al 2014](#))

Data that Support Recommendation: On February 17, 2021 Dr. Conn, Christine presented to the subgroup and shared the following resources in support of tracking environmental justice: "Environmental Sustainability Board" which highlights The Maryland Park Equity Mapper as well as the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Justice and Equity Dashboard ([Map Series](#)) as valuable resources in tracking and assessing racial disparities.

On February 17, 2021, Tim Lattimer, Chair of the Columbia Association, Climate Change and Sustainability Advisory Committee, also presented to the subgroup and discussed "Environmental Justice: Local Action Considerations". On March 4, 2021, Tim Lattimer testified that "The County should also make environmental justice a cornerstone of Howard County's environmental, climate, & land use policies going forward" and this recommendation builds, in part, on the action steps outlined in Lattimer's testimony.

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years): Short-term

Equitable Green Spaces and Infrastructure

Recommendation 3: We recommend the County Council pass legislation to establish a workgroup facilitated by an external consultant to achieve equitable distribution, access to and use of the county's green spaces and Green Infrastructure Network by:

- completing an equity analysis, using targeted universalism, that helps to direct coming state and county funds to communities of color that may lack tree canopy.
- develop evidence-based strategies for involving residents of color in citizen science and tree care activities as a health promotion for people and trees.
- evaluating public transportation strategies to make certain that communities of color have transportation options to access public green spaces for recreation and health.
- assess the extent and nature of neighbor bias/suspicion that can limit residents of color use of public green spaces and develop strategies to combat unwarranted suspicion.

Intent Behind Recommendation: Green Space and tree canopy have significant public health benefits ([Urban Trees and Human Health: A Scoping Review](#)).

Racial Equity Impact: To investigate if and where disparities exist in quality, access to and use of green spaces and the Green Infrastructure Network in the county and close any gaps. Targeted universalism is also an effective strategy in closing gaps.

Data that Support Recommendation: During a Howard County Library sponsored event on February 18, 2021, a Howard County resident of color testified on Howard County Police Department limiting use of the built environment (sidewalks) for health promotion through harassment while going for walk:

"...I was racially profiled and threatened by three members of the HCPD while going for a walk on St. John's Lane (the first officer said they were stopping everyone who looked like they didn't live in the area), and then harassed for a year by other officers after I reported the initial

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incident. I chose to use that experience to create some tools that can be used to change things through positive learning experiences." The Local Children's Health Board's Winter 2019 report "Access to Opportunity in Howard County: making the Case for Equity" indicates that policing impacts children's healthy outdoor free play in the county as well.

On May 6, 2021, Indivisible Howard County testified that "Trees help mitigate climate change by reducing CO2 and preventing soil erosion. Lack of tree canopy creates heat deserts common in communities of color. State legislative action has mandated planting of trees for environmental benefit with a designation for marginal communities."

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years): Short-term

Equitable Growth Masterplan

Recommendation 4: We recommend the County Council pass a resolution to develop an Equitable Growth Masterplan. An Equitable Growth Profile (EGP) is a resource that supports advocacy groups, government agencies, elected officials, funders, business and civic leaders, and more in advancing equity. The EGP can also include a summary report that highlights critical indicators and offers policy recommendations.

Intent Behind Recommendation: To provide the County with tools to assess disparities that cross traditional government sectors and create holistic strategies to eliminate racial disparities and ultimately improve outcomes for all.

Racial Equity Impact: Health promoting built environments, which may include features like walking and biking paths, access to public transportation and full-service grocery stores, can improve physical and mental well-being. Poor community design (e.g., car-centric with limited recreational spaces) may encourage sedentary habits and exacerbate public health problems like obesity, diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and depression (CDC "[Health in All Policies](#)"). Concrete data on, and mapping of, inequities as well as mechanisms for routine assessment of equity impacts in government planning not only clarifies equity goals for staff and local partners but motivates positive action to close disparities. ([Godsil et al 2014](#))

Data that Supports Recommendation: Equitable growth profiles are a Local and National Government Alliance on Racial Equity (GARE) tool. The CDC also encouraged use of HiAP in the National Prevention Strategy 2020 which is a source of evidence based recommendations for improving health and wellness. The examples from participating jurisdictions, including Baltimore, ought to provide examples of evidence-based practice for addressing disparities. (CDC "[Health in All Policies](#)" NIH [National Prevention Strategy 2020](#))

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years): Short-term

Public transportation

Recommendation 5: We recommend the Howard County Council pass legislation to invest equitably in mass transportation in Howard County and, as a first step, develop a screening tool that can help determine mass transportation investments in priority communities.

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Intent Behind Recommendation

Several New England and Mid-Atlantic states (currently not including Maryland) are collaborating as part of the Transportation and Climate Initiative Program (TCI-P). Howard County can bypass Maryland's lack of engagement in the TCI-P, and potentially motivate the State's participation by developing a screening tool that can help determine mass transportation investments in priority communities. This tool can be modeled on the Massachusetts GIS-based tool called Massachusetts Screening System to Recognize those who are Overburdened and Underserved by Transportation, Environment, and Socioeconomic status ([MassROUTES](#)).

Racial Equity Impact: Policymakers from across the region see potential in the TCI-P as a tool to begin to address legacy inequities in environmental, public health, and transportation justice. Advocacy groups have reinforced the program with strong protections and commitments for overburdened and underserved communities. A challenging and critical preliminary step is to define and identify what "overburdened and underserved" means in each jurisdiction. This is the question the screening tool can answer.

Data that Support Recommendation: Access to public transportation can improve physical and mental well-being (CDC ["Health in All Policies"](#)). County residents also emphasized the need for improved public transportation during the RETF public hearings:

On May 5, 2021 The Association of Community Services of Howard County (ACS) testified that "...Maximizing our investments in public transportation should be an ongoing priority to benefit the environment as well as better connect us to one another and work opportunities throughout the whole County. " In connection with the same hearing, IndivisibleHoCoMD submitted "Strong public transit systems are essential for our state's economy and the environment. The Transit Safety and Investment Act passed by the 2021 State Legislature will provide funding for our local RTA bus system. ...Expansion of the Howard County bus system to connect to major mass transit hubs would be particularly critical to marginalized neighborhoods and essential workers who utilize it for work, medical, and school. Environmental justice requires adequate, well-functioning public transportation."

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years): Short-term

New, permanent health and climate equity home or resilience infrastructure

Recommendation 6: We recommend the County Council pass legislation, and request the County Executive fund, an interdepartmental collaborative lab to be a permanent home for the county's Health Equity and Climate Resilience efforts that includes:

- A formal partnership with a state university research center
- Evidence-based community engagement with business owners, non-profits, faith communities and residents of color.
- Appointment of Environmental Justice Ombudsperson

Intent Behind Recommendation: Human and environmental health and intimately related and residents and communities of color are often exposed to more social and environmental stressors. An interdepartmental collaborative would give residents of color more choice and resiliency as well as supply the infrastructure to contribute to the critical work of eliminating racial disparities. Moreover, a collaborative would aid alignment with federal standards for

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resilient infrastructure and better position the County in securing federal funds. The ombudsperson would help elevate and channel residents of color's voices and to serve as a possible platform for capacity building, both for community members and for other County staff.

Racial Equity Impact: Research indicates that interdepartmental collaboratives with support from local university research centers is a critical tool in reducing racial disparities at the intersection of health equity and climate resiliency. It also enables holistic solutions to complex health equity and climate justice challenges by integrating government sectors.

Data that Support Recommendation: Research shows that racial disparities increase after crises like natural disasters (Coffee 2021 "How State Governments Can Help Communities Invest in Climate Resilience"). Therefore the federal government is strongly encouraging resiliency infrastructure because of the increased frequency of crises contributes to social instability and increase costs to local governments (Plastrick et al 2021 MD Department of Planning webinar: Getting Ready (Finally) to Build Climate Resilience http://smartgrowth.org/getting-ready-finally-to-build-local-climate-resilience/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery&utm_term=). The Office of Community Sustainability and its community partners are in earnest developing the nascent structures to begin addressing disparities in Climate Justice and Food Sovereignty but the county unfortunately lacks the collaborative based infrastructure to meet the federal standard.

On March 4, 2021, Tim Lattimer provided public testimony outlining how the County should... make environmental justice a cornerstone of Howard County's environmental, climate, & land use policies going forward.

Timeframe to Impact- short term (0 to 2 years) or long term (over 2+ years):Long-term

Appendix

1. To address maternal health disparities, the County Council should pass a bill to create funded program to incentivize practices such as federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) that provide care to racially and ethnically diverse populations to hire doulas and midwives in Howard county.
2. Set targets for diversifying Office of Community Sustainability staff and its affiliated boards and committees as well as provide Climate Justice based professional development for all staff, board and committee members.