

Media Statement By Dr. Gail C. Christopher: America 5 Years After George Floyd's Murder

Dr. Christopher, leader of the National Collaborative for Health Equity, says racial justice faces headwinds, but accomplishments have not been erased

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Five years ago, at the intersection of 38th Street and Chicago Avenue in South Minneapolis, George Floyd died

after Derek Chauvin, a white police officer, pressed his knee on George Floyd's neck. Floyd was face down on the concrete, insisting he couldn't breathe and, in distress, expressing a fear of dying. Videos of the prone, restrained 46-year-old, suspected of using a counterfeit \$20 bill, went viral, spurring massive mobilization against police brutality and racial injustice: Twenty-six million people protested in communities across the country, as diverse populations united in a call for change.

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Dr. Gail C. Christopher

Today, many in America believe our nation is moving away from this moment of “racial reckoning,” the movement that poured millions into equity initiatives, fostered police reforms, increased awareness of systemic racism, and revealed a renewed sense of urgency and unity against racial bias not felt since the 1960s Civil Rights Movement.

The racial justice movement faces headwinds today, but the noise may be overshadowing the accomplishments that foster equity and justice in our communities:

□ At least [149 cities, 95 counties, and 24 states](#) have declared that racism is a public health crisis or emergency, with the overwhelming majority announced following Floyd's death. The resolutions and statements are not legally binding, but they draw attention to the harm and damage that racism causes in many aspects of life, especially health. Racism has an effect on physical and mental health. Episodes of discrimination can increase stress, which in turn, contributes to heart disease, high blood pressure, and immune system problems. Racism can also raise risks of anxiety and depression.



NCH

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for Health Equity

□ In Minneapolis, the U.S. Department of Justice is rescinding a consent decree addressing racial bias, excessive force, and implementing a more accountable process, moves designed to ensure that future suspects aren't victims of police brutality. Nevertheless, Mayor Jacob Frey declared, "We're doing it anyway. We will implement every reform outlined in the consent decree—because accountability isn't optional." □ The city also has mental health responders available to respond to 911 calls 24 hours a day.

□ According to Congressman Keith Ellison, who, as Minnesota Attorney General, successfully prosecuted Chauvin, the conviction was an important warning that no one is above the law and that systemic changes are needed to address police brutality and ensure accountability nationwide. "I never was under the illusion that winning this case was going to change police brutality cases," Ellison said recently. "I knew it wasn't, but I did hope that as a product, Congress would pick up the mantle and we could have some system-wide change."

□ Across the country, at least [32 of the 65 largest law enforcement departments](#) have banned or restricted the use of neck restraints, similar to the one Chauvin used on Floyd.

□ California enacted a Racial Justice Act, which allows defendants to challenge convictions if they believe there was racial bias in the legal process. It also makes it illegal for the state to seek or obtain a criminal conviction or impose a sentence based on race, ethnicity, or national origin. While this is a single state-based effort, it can serve as a blueprint for related reforms in other states.

Meanwhile, there should be a recognition that resistance against racial progress is not a new phenomenon.

When slaves were freed and the Civil War ended, the Ku Klux Klan was born. After Reconstruction, came the Jim Crow era. The election of President Obama led to increased suppression and disenfranchisement of voters.

The regressions never totally erase the progress that was made. These examples, and so many more, demonstrate the sustained progress and the power of a collective vision for equality and human rights. It is here, it is lasting, and it will lead to the transformation that helps this nation



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achieve its aspirational tenets.

The founding documents of this nation assert that all are created equal and endowed by our creator with the inalienable right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. In remembering the tragic death of George Floyd and the unprecedented movement for justice that it generated, our focus can be drawn to the All and to the power of our collective efforts.

(For broadcast or print interviews with Dr. Christopher, please contact Michael K. Frisby at Mike@frisbyassociates.com or 202-625-4328.)

Dr. Gail C. Christopher, the Executive Director of the National Collaborative for Health Equity, is also a Senior Scholar at the Center for Advancement of Well-Being at George Mason University and a former Senior Advisor and Vice President of the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. She led the development and launch of Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation (TRHT) at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation. Her new book is [RX-Racial Healing: A Guide to Embracing Our Humanity](#).

About NCHE

Founded in 2014, NCHE was established to promote health equity through action, leadership, inclusion, and collaboration. NCHE works to create environments that foster the best possible health outcomes for all populations, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or nativity. NCHE also works to improve conditions for health and well-being, including housing, education, income and wealth, and the physical and social environment. Further, NCHE believes that it is imperative that we address historical and contemporary structural, institutional, and interpersonal racism, which fuels inequities in our society.

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