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Contact: Brian Reardon
breardon@chausa.org

Catholic Health Care Systems Make Comprehensive Commitment to Confronting Racism by Achieving Health Equity

WASHINGTON, DC – The Catholic Health Association of the United States (CHA) today launched a membership-driven initiative to confront racism by achieving health equity.

Twenty-three of the nation’s largest Catholic health care systems have already pledged their commitment to confronting systemic racism by prioritizing equity in response to COVID-19; enacting change across their own health care systems by examining and changing hiring, promotion and retention practices to ensure diversity and inclusion; forming stronger partnerships with communities of color to improve health outcomes; and leveraging their united and powerful voice to advocate for policy changes that address the root causes of racism and social injustice.

“COVID-19’s greater impact on communities of color and the police killings of George Floyd and others demonstrate the urgent need to address the devastating impact racism has on the health and well-being of individuals and communities,” said Sr. Mary Haddad, RSM, CHA president and CEO. “We in the Catholic health ministry, responding to the Gospel mandate for justice, are called to renew our commitment to eliminate the racial inequities in our communities and to acknowledge and confront our own shortcomings so that we can become agents of healing and positive change.”

Collectively, the Catholic health organizations who have signed the Catholic Health Association of the United States’ (CHA) [*Confronting Racism by Achieving Health Equity*](#) pledge employ nearly a half million people across 46 states and the District of Columbia and care for almost four million patients annually (see list below).

Recognizing that racism is an affront to the core values of Catholic social teaching, the CHA board of trustees developed the pledge and asked CHA members to join in solidarity to promote the common good and seek justice by being actively anti-racist and accountable in effecting positive change in the communities we serve.

Four focus areas

- **Act for COVID-19 equity:** Members commit to ensuring that testing for COVID-19 is available and accessible in minority communities and that new treatments are distributed and used equitably as they become available. Members will also work for prioritization of vaccinations for those individuals and families at higher risk — especially elder populations and communities of color, including indigenous communities. For example, CommonSpirit Health is partnering with the Morehouse School of Medicine to develop and train more culturally competent providers. The 10-year, \$100 million initiative will enable the Morehouse School of Medicine to expand opportunities for Black and other underrepresented physicians and will help

improve COVID-19 testing, care delivery, and vaccine allocation directed toward the most vulnerable populations.

“We believe that everyone has the right to be healthy,” said Lloyd H. Dean, president and CEO of CommonSpirit Health. “Health equity is impacted by factors inside and outside of our facilities – from access to housing, food and transportation to culturally competent clinicians who have common lived experience. It’s time for us to come together to solve these problems proactively and holistically.”

- **Enact change across our own health systems:** Members are examining how their organizations recruit, hire, promote and retain employees; how they conduct business operations, including visible diversity and inclusivity at the decision, leadership and governance levels; and how they incentivize and hold our leaders accountable. Examples include Hospital Sisters Health System’s creation of a diversity council and CHRISTUS Health’s formation of a minority executive fellowship program.

“Catholic health care providers have long been a beacon of hope for our communities,” said Ernie Sadau, president and CEO of CHRISTUS Health. “Yet again, we are called to lead by example, to take an active role in health equity within the walls of our health care ministries. We understand that equity is not just something we do ‘out there.’ It starts ‘in here.’ That’s why, at CHRISTUS, health equity has been one of the key focuses of our organization since our founding and a vital part of our strategic plan for many years, as we work with our communities to lead the way on racial justice. This is why we are participating in CHA’s Health Equity pledge, and I’m proud to be part of a health ministry that is working so hard to achieve health equity and confront racial injustice.”

- **Advocate for improved health outcomes for minority communities and populations:** Members agree to promote and improve the delivery of culturally competent care and oppose policies that exacerbate or perpetuate economic and social inequities, including such issues as education, housing and criminal justice reform. For example, Trinity New England is enhancing local early education and care sites through nutrition and physical activity programs, and pushing for policies for improved school nutrition, complete streets infrastructure, and tobacco use prevention.

"As a Catholic health ministry with a mission rooted in love, respect, justice and compassion, we are called to act and speak in a manner reflecting our reverence for the dignity and diversity of life," said Joseph R. Impicciche, JD, MHA, president and CEO of Ascension. "This sacred calling and responsibility also demand that we advocate for the marginalized and condemn all forms of racism, discrimination and injustice as we work together to ensure all individuals are treated justly and respectfully, with equal access to opportunities and resources."

- **Strengthen trust with minority communities:** Members will continue to foster, strengthen and sustain authentic relationships based on mutually agreed goals to better understand the unique needs of their communities. Examples include Ascension’s creation of a dedicated emergency department to serve higher risk obstetrics patients in Milwaukee and multiple systems’ work with Catholic Charities USA on its Healthy Housing Initiative (HHI), which aims to support and reduce the chronically homeless population.

Catholic health care leaders who have signed the pledge recognize that collectively they are in a unique position to bring about overdue change to policies and practices that have allowed systemic racism and health disparities to continue in the United States. To hold itself and its members accountable, CHA intends to provide updates on the commitment progress annually and will focus on diversity, equity and inclusion during its annual member meeting, taking place June 13-14, 2021.

Sr. Haddad, Mr. Dean, and Mr. Sadau joined Dr. Tamarah Duperval-Brownlee, senior vice president and chief community impact officer at Ascension, in announcing the pledge commitment during a Feb. 4, 2021 media briefing, which can be viewed [here](#). To learn more about this initiative visit <https://www.chausa.org/cha-we-are-called/>.

The 23 Catholic health care organizations that have signed the pledge are:

Ascension
Avera Health
Benedictine
Bon Secours Mercy Health
CHRISTUS Health
CommonSpirit Health
Covenant Health
Elizabeth Seton Children's
Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System, Inc.
Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity Sponsored Ministries, Inc.
Holy Redeemer Health System
Hospital Sisters Health System
Mercy
Mercy Health Services, Inc.
MercyOne
Peace Care St. Ann's
PeaceHealth
Providence St. Joseph Health
SCL Health
Sisters of Charity Health System
SMP Health System
SSM Health
Trinity Health

Other quotes from Catholic health leaders participating in pledge

*Bob Sutton, President and CEO
Avera Health*

“Because we are all created in God’s image and all belong to the same human family, Avera continues to work toward health equity and social equity for all. Just one example is our work with American Indians, who comprise 9% of South Dakota’s population and are the largest racial minority group we serve. This group also experiences some of the biggest health disparities in terms of outcomes in categories such as cancer, suicide, chronic liver disease and diabetes, as well as our latest health threat – COVID-19. We’ve developed partnerships that are working to address complex issues within our footprint, reaching out to at-risk populations through innovative means like

telemedicine and meeting people where they are in the spirit of cultural humility and respect. We're signing this pledge because we recognize the challenges and want to be part of the solution."

Jerry Carley, President and CEO

Benedictine

"The sense of community is a defining characteristic of Benedictine Health System. Community comes from our shared experiences that shapes our lives, joins us together and gives us unity and peace. We remember that with the vastness of our interdependent world, we are still one family. We stand strong in solidarity as we relate to each other with dignity, care and respect. I am proud and honored and – together with my colleague CEOs – to have signed on to this ministry-wide initiative to create a more just world now and into the future."

John Starcher, President and CEO

Bon Secours Mercy Health

"At Bon Secours Mercy Health, we are committed to extending the compassionate ministry of Jesus and bringing good help to those in need, especially those who are poor, dying and underserved. It is imperative that together, we address health disparities, especially in underserved communities. Providing greater access to high-quality health care regardless of race, economic status or other social factors is core to our mission. The time for health equity is now, and we stand with CHA in its work to care for others as Jesus would."

Stephen J. Grubbs, President and CEO

Covenant Health

"At Covenant Health, we are honored to stand beside our brothers and sisters in the Catholic Healthcare ministry as we join the Catholic Health Association through our pledge to Confront Racism by Achieving Health Equity. Covenant is proud to be entrusted with the ministries of multiple congregations who have served countless underserved, frail and vulnerable populations for generations. This is ongoing work. Our pledge to join *We Are Called* represents our commitment to continuing the vision of our founding sponsors and to improving the health and well-being of all in our care – today and in the future."

Pat Tursi, CEO

Elizabeth Seton Children's

"We unite in the call to end systemic racism and health inequity in America. The difficult work must be done to repair the pervasive racial disparities that exist in health care and beyond and to heal the pain in our communities. Elizabeth Seton Children's believes that we are all God's children and hate has no place in our communities; all life is sacred. We affirm, in the words of our foundress, St. Elizabeth Seton, that 'All are Welcome' and belong – belonging is a lifeline. Elizabeth Seton Children's is committed to being part of the solution and standing up as allies in the fight for justice, equality, respect and truth."

Richard R. Vath, MD, President and CEO

Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System

"Our challenges as individuals and organizations compel us to look at ourselves with truth before we can ever adequately serve others. Recent events in our nation and communities bring that responsibility to a new urgency as well as resolve. In our ministry, our Sisters wisely identified both justice and humility among our core values. Authenticity in the healing ministry of Jesus Christ requires both objectivity and action – to see clearly where we have not before, and then to do the work we must with conviction. We humbly join with our brothers and sisters of Catholic healthcare in making this pledge against systemic racism and the disparities it has created everywhere,

especially health. We pray for all who are on this journey and all who will be touched by its revelation.”

Scott McConnaha, President and CEO

Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity Sponsored Ministries, Inc.

“All of us in the Catholic health ministry take great pride in knowing that we were founded so many years ago with a response to the injustice of unmet needs among our neighbors. The call continues, and the injustices of our time are racism and health disparities. There is nothing more meaningful we can do to validate and extend the mission of Catholic health care than to gather around this cause and show what means it to truly love one’s neighbor.”

Michael Laign, President and CEO

Holy Redeemer Health System

"The pandemic has opened our eyes even further to health disparities. As an organization, we are committed to doing our part to foster a diverse, equitable environment and to address healthcare disparities in the communities we serve in Pennsylvania and New Jersey."

Mary Starmann-Harrison, President and CEO

Hospital Sisters Health System

“Signing the CHA’s *Confronting Racism by Achieving Health Equity* pledge was an easy decision because the call aligns directly with our mission. We are proud to step forward to show our continued commitment to ensure equity and inclusion in our community, our patient care and throughout our organization.”

Lynn Britton, President and CEO

Mercy (St. Louis)

“Like the Sisters of Mercy before us, we know good health care not only preserves life, but provides the opportunity to live fully and well. We pledge to continue working for health equity for all people.”

Bob Ritz, President and CEO

MercyOne

“We live in a time where we are called to come together to heal our communities and to address the challenges we face as a nation. As health care professionals, our mission and our call extend to our broader communities by emphasizing the Catholic values we bring to caring for our patients every day, including compassion, reverence and justice. At MercyOne, our promise is to help each person have their best life. To fulfill our mission and stand by our promise, we are committed to address the challenges of racial disparities and health inequities by working in our communities to improve the health and outlook of everyone we are privileged to serve. MercyOne has adopted a charter to help guide and advance this work internally. Together, we must continue to find ways to address the historical challenges of our differences and find ways to unify our communities through our special ministry of mercy.”

Liz Dunne, President and CEO

PeaceHealth

“PeaceHealth and other Catholic healthcare leaders have a responsibility to shine a light on the profound negative impact that systemic inequities have on health and well-being. In partnership with CHA, we are called to promote the inherent dignity of each person and to be champions of change in pursuit of social and health justice for all. Starting with our own caregivers and communities, we

will seek out and address the structural disparities further exposed by the pandemic that impact those most in need. Our charge is to enact sustainable change, through which access to equitable, affordable whole person care — physical, mental, social and spiritual — is available to everyone. That is the PeaceHealth Mission in action and the commitment guiding us forward.”

*Rod Hochman, M.D., President and CEO
Providence St. Joseph Health*

“Systemic racism has persisted as a known issue in health care and the social determinants of health for decades. It’s time to move beyond just talking about or studying the problem. We are called to do something about it and take meaningful action. That’s why health equity is a strategic priority for Providence and why we are proud to join with our colleagues in Catholic health care to ensure everyone in our communities has an equal chance to live the healthiest life possible.”

*Lydia Jumonville, President and CEO
SCL Health*

“Social justice and equity have been foundations engrained in SCL Health by our foundresses, the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth, who built our ministry on a mission to improve the health of the people and communities we serve, especially those who are most vulnerable. Core to that mission is providing inclusive and equitable healthcare for all. I am proud to stand with my colleagues in taking the Catholic Health Association’s *We Are Called* pledge, as it means we are acknowledging the profound impact racism has on the health and well-being of individuals and communities of color, which contributes to health disparities. Being part of this pledge creates a focused, shared commitment to come together to listen, learn and act, and to use the power of our collective voices to advocate for the change needed to eliminate systemic racism and health inequity.”

*Thomas Strauss, President & CEO
Sisters of Charity Health System*

"We affirm that each person is sacred and worthy of our deepest reverence. Taking the pledge to achieve health equity renews our commitment to work in solidarity to end the racism and violence that continues to devastate the health and well-being of too many. Our foundresses, the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, began in 1851 an enduring legacy of responsive ministry, creative stewardship and an ongoing quest for social justice. Their ministry has always endeavored to listen, empower and walk alongside marginalized individuals, families and communities. Together as Catholic health ministry, we must knock down the walls of injustice that will grant future generations of Black Americans access to higher social, economic and political power."

*Aaron Alton, President and CEO
SMP Health System*

"SMP Health System proudly participates in CHA’s *Confronting Racism by Achieving Health Equity* pledge. There is no place in health care for race as a factor in the delivery of services and, with the commitment of all Catholic health care ministries under CHA’s leadership, we can make a difference."

*Laura S. Kaiser, FACHE, President and CEO
SSM Health*

“This past year has further demonstrated the important and influential role that healthcare systems can and should play in shaping local communities and society at large. SSM Health is proud to join this pledge and will continue taking bold steps to ensure better health for all – particularly those who are economically, physically and socially marginalized.”

*Michael Slubowski, President and Chief Executive Officer
Trinity Health*

"We know racism is a public health crisis. And Trinity Health is committed to breaking down barriers and improving health disparities that result from inequities and systemic racism. I appreciate the Catholic Health Association's leadership across our ministries as we work together for racial justice."

*Tamarah Duperval-Brownlee, MD, Senior Vice President and Chief Community Impact Officer
Ascension*

"We are honored to join together for this milestone moment to renew our collective commitment to prioritize equity and confront systemic racism as we also work to continue fostering trust among the patients and communities we are blessed to serve. As health systems, we are called to take an active role in improving access to care by tackling health disparities and removing socioeconomic barriers for all, showcasing the power of representation and ensuring that our teams apply cultural humility so we can listen, learn and reflect to better understand the issues affecting the health and well-being of individuals and communities of color, so we can continue to take thoughtful action to address them."

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The Catholic Health Association of the United States is the national leadership organization of the Catholic health ministry, representing the largest nonprofit provider of health care services in the nation.

- 1 in 7 patients in the U.S. is cared for in a Catholic hospital each day.
- Catholic health care, which includes more than 2,200 hospitals, nursing homes, long-term care facilities, systems, sponsors, and related organizations, serves the full continuum of health care across our nation.