

Examining the role of public health in racism

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In a new article published in *Harvard Public Health Review*, Doctor of Public Health (DrPH) students critically examine the role of public health in racism and oppression and how they, as the future leaders of public health, would like to see this addressed and changed.

"As leaders in public health, DrPH students have a unique and critical opportunity to reshape the complex systemic and structural barriers that have disadvantaged [communities of color](#) for far too long," said Nicole Reed, a DrPH student at Colorado School of Public Health on the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. Reed is a co-author of the article.

This is the first time a US journal has dedicated an entire special issue to DrPH students and graduates. Colorado School of Public Health students join DrPH students and graduates across the country to outline actionable steps to address the nation's public health inequities.

"We believe decolonization of public health institutions can occur through the creation of new paradigms for funding agencies and training of public health students," added co-author Sarah Boland, a DrPH [student](#) at the Colorado School of Public Health.

The authors highlight the impact of racial inequities exacerbating the inability of public health to assist communities of color during the COVID-19 pandemic properly. They underscore that the scope of public health can have far-reaching effects that touch individuals and communities in multiple ways outside of the pandemic and that learning from the past—while simultaneously creating new standards and policies—is critical.

Within the paper, the authors share six ways funding agencies can decolonize public health. They also outline seven ways schools of public health can train both their students and faculty in a manner that de-centers the colonial mentality, addresses power imbalances found within the classroom and the community, and helps facilitate reconciliation in the communities that students and graduates work with by centering their needs and wants.

Examples of recommended actions include [funding agencies](#) to invest in community-based participatory research and systems-level interventions that address root causes of inequities. Another is for public health schools to teach and model non-Western research methods and traditional ways of knowing.

The authors conclude that "DrPH students are trained to be the future of public health practice and research. To ensure true [health](#) equity of the field, DrPH students must acknowledge and learn from the past while simultaneously creating and upholding new standards and practices—not only for the sake of [public health](#) as a whole but for the life of the communities in which we serve."

More information: Boland S, et al, Addressing the cycle of inaction: a DrPH student perspective on the decolonization of public health. *HPHR* (2021). hphr.org/35-article-boland/

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