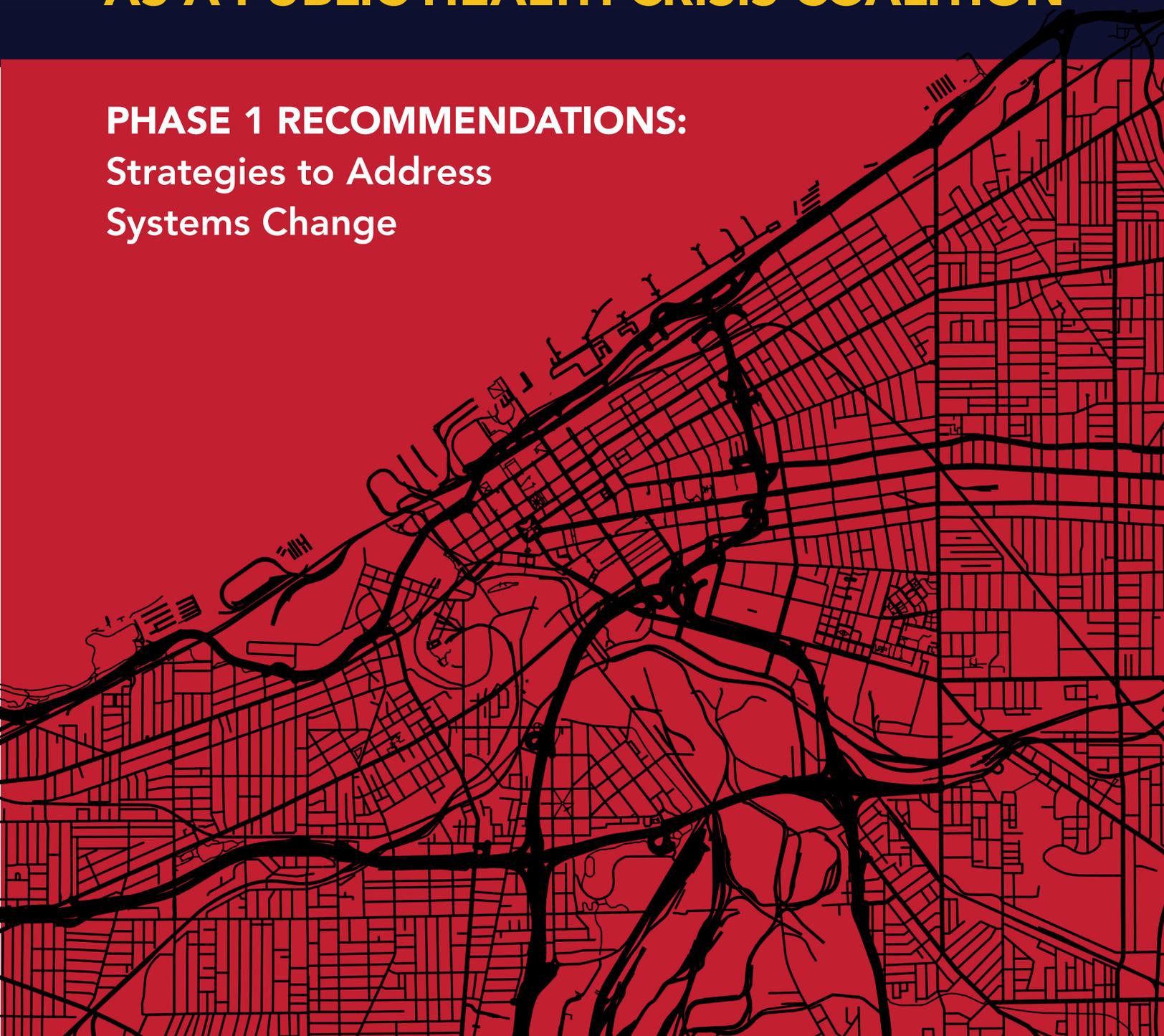


RACISM:

AS A PUBLIC HEALTH CRISIS COALITION

PHASE 1 RECOMMENDATIONS:
Strategies to Address
Systems Change





Acknowledgements

The work of Racism as a Public Health Crisis Coalition (RAPHC-C) would not be possible without the dedication, hard work, and passion of many individuals and organizations. Their efforts have helped bring attention to racism as a public health crisis in Cleveland and have driven important conversations and actions for change.

We are especially grateful to **Cleveland City Council President Blaine Griffin** and **Mayor Justin Bibb** for their leadership and strong support. Their commitment to addressing racial inequalities has played a key role in moving this work forward and improving the lives of Cleveland residents.

We also want to recognize the many leaders, community members, and organizations who have contributed to this effort. The RAPHC-C Executive Committee, Pillar Co-Chairs, and Pillar Strategists have worked tirelessly to research issues, listen to the community, and develop recommended strategies. Their knowledge and dedication have been essential in shaping this report and the larger movement for racial justice in Cleveland.

Most importantly, we thank the **residents of Cleveland** who took the time to share their experiences, attend meetings, and advocate for solutions. Your voices have guided our work every step of the way, and your input is shaping a more fair and just future for our city.

This report is just the beginning—a starting point for the work ahead. Creating lasting change will require collaboration, commitment, and action from every part of our community. We invite residents, businesses, and local leaders to join us in moving this work forward, together.

With gratitude,

The RAPHC-C Executive Committee

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Executive Summary

Racism is a deeply rooted, systemic issue that profoundly affects the well-being of Cleveland residents.

It creates barriers to healthcare, education, safe housing, and economic opportunity, making it harder for people of color to lead healthy, secure, and equitable lives. Recognizing the urgent need for change, Cleveland City Council declared racism a public health crisis in 2020. This declaration acknowledges racism as a fundamental issue impacting health and quality of life and highlights its presence in housing, education, the workforce, healthcare, and the justice system.

The Racism as a Public Health Crisis Coalition (RAPH-C) was created to address these inequities by uniting residents, organizations, and leaders to drive meaningful change. Community engagement has been central to this work, ensuring that recommended strategies reflect the real needs of Clevelanders. Through listening sessions, residents shared their experiences and priorities, helping shape the focus of this initiative.

This report is an overview of the first phase of the RAPH-C work to dismantle systemic racism in Cleveland. It presents RAPH-C's research, insights, and initial recommendations, setting the stage for sustained action in five key areas:

- Criminal Justice
- Education
- Health & Public Health
- Housing, Environment & Infrastructure
- Workforce Development, Economic Mobility & Wealth Creation

These recommended strategies are just the first step. Real progress will require collaboration, shared responsibility, and a long-term commitment. RAPH-C is dedicated to expanding and deepening this work by:

- Partnering with residents, businesses, and organizations to put recommended strategies into action
- Continuously collecting and sharing data to measure impact and progress
- Strengthening community connections to keep this work responsive and effective

Transforming Cleveland into a more just and equitable city will not happen overnight. It will take all of us—residents, businesses, policymakers, and community leaders—working together. We invite you to join us as we take the first steps toward real and lasting change.

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Introduction to RAPHC-C

The **“Racism as a Public Health Crisis Coalition” (RAPHC-C) initiative** works to recognize and address racism as a serious problem that affects people’s health and well-being in Cleveland, Ohio. This effort acknowledges that racism is not just about fairness—it also harms public health, especially in communities of color.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT & NEED FOR ACTION

Unfair policies, rules, and systems have historically made life harder for people of color, and the effects of these disadvantages are still visible today. Systemic racism has led to disparities in key areas of life, including:

- **Criminal Justice Impacts** – Black and Brown residents are more likely to be arrested and receive longer sentences.
- **Education Outcomes** – Students of color face greater challenges in school, from kindergarten through college.
- **Health Outcomes** – Black Clevelanders live shorter lives and experience higher rates of preventable diseases and gun violence.
- **Basic Needs & Stability** – Many families of color struggle with high housing costs, food shortages and insecurity, and unreliable public transportation.
- **Economic Opportunity** – Black and Brown workers are less likely to have high-paying jobs, making it harder to earn a living wage and build long-term wealth.

These problems are not accidental. They stem from unfair systems that must change. The RAPHC-C initiative was created to address these deep-rooted inequities and dismantle the structural barriers that prevent communities of color from thriving.

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

The City of Cleveland has taken steps to embed equity into its public health and government systems. In 2020, it declared Racism a Public Health Crisis. The following year, the Division of Health Equity & Social Justice (HESJ) was established within the Department of Public Health to improve health outcomes, remove systemic barriers, and support thriving neighborhoods. The City and community partners continue to advance this work through several key initiatives:

- **Interdepartmental Equity Team (IET)** – Reviews and reforms city policies and practices that impact health and equity. The team created a Strategic Plan, adopted a Health and Equity Impact Assessment Tool, and guides data-driven change across departments.
- **Equity Advisory Group (EAG)** – A senior leadership body driving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion across city departments. It completed an Equity Inventory and submitted recommendations to the mayor to support systemic improvements.
- **Racism as a Public Health Crisis Coalition (RAPHC-C)** – A cross-sector coalition advancing strategies to dismantle structural racism and reduce disparities in criminal justice, education, health, housing, the environment, infrastructure, workforce development, economic mobility, and wealth creation.

KEY ASPECTS OF RAPHC-C

The RAPHC-C initiative employs a multi-faceted approach to address systemic racism and its impact on public health. Key aspects of the initiative include:

- **Recognition of Racism as a Public Health Crisis** – Officially acknowledging racism as a determinant of health and advocating for systemic change.
- **Use of Results-Based Accountability (RBA)** – Utilizing a data-driven approach to identify and analyze racial disparities in health outcomes, healthcare access, and other social determinants of health.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration** – Engaging government agencies, healthcare providers, community organizations, advocacy groups, and other stakeholders to develop and implement comprehensive strategies.
- **Community Engagement & Empowerment** – Ensuring that those most affected by racism are actively involved in decision-making processes to foster community-driven solutions.
- **Policy Advocacy & Action** – Advocating for policy changes at the local, state, and national levels to dismantle structural barriers and promote health equity, including anti-discrimination policies and investments in underserved communities.
- **Health Equity Framework** – Addressing the underlying social determinants of health, such as poverty, housing instability, educational disparities, and environmental injustice, which are shaped by systemic racism.
- **Education & Awareness** – Raising awareness through educational campaigns and community dialogues to promote racial equity and inclusion.
- **Economic Empowerment** – Implementing programs that support minority-owned businesses, create economic opportunities, and address disparities in wealth and income.

CHALLENGES & LESSONS LEARNED

Despite significant progress, the initiative has faced several challenges, including resistance from entrenched interests, resource constraints, and the complexity of addressing deeply ingrained structural barriers. However, the collective impact collaborative has learned valuable lessons about the importance of sustained advocacy, data-driven decision-making, and cross-sector collaboration in driving meaningful change.

DESIRED OUTCOMES

Through the collective efforts of RAPHC-C, several strategies have been recommended to advance racial equity and dismantle systemic barriers in Cleveland. Desired outcomes include:

- Policy changes aimed at reducing racial disparities in criminal justice and housing.
- Increased access to education and economic opportunities for communities of color.
- Improved healthcare access and better health outcomes through targeted interventions.
- Strengthened community networks and grassroots empowerment.

Finally, the **Racism as a Public Health Crisis Coalition initiative** represents a bold and comprehensive approach to confronting the root causes of racial disparities and working toward health equity for all residents. By addressing systemic inequities together, Cleveland can become a place where all people—regardless of race—have the opportunity to thrive.

The Groundwater Metaphor

WHAT IS SYSTEMIC RACISM?

Systemic racism means that the rules, policies and practices of a society or organization unfairly harm certain racial or ethnic groups while benefiting others. Unlike personal racism, which involves individuals treating others unfairly, systemic racism exists throughout institutions, like schools, healthcare, housing, jobs and the justice system. Systemic racism allows racial inequalities to continue by reinforcing and repeating historical patterns of discrimination and oppression, making it harder for some groups to access to opportunities, resources, and rights based on race or ethnicity. Systemic racism may be obvious or harder to see, but its effects run deep, impacting people and communities for generations.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

The [groundwater metaphor](#), created by the Racial Equity Institute (REI), is often used to help people understand systemic racism, how it operates in society and how it impacts everyone. Groundwater, or water that is stored in natural formations in the earth, is an important source of drinking water and feeds many lakes. However, groundwater can be polluted by chemicals and waste that seep into the ground. Left untreated, contaminated groundwater can harm people, plants, and wildlife.

Consider this example paraphrased from REI's work :

- If you find a dead fish in a lake, you might assume something is wrong with that one fish.
- If you find many dead fish in the same lake, you might suspect something is wrong with the lake itself.
- If you find dead fish in multiple lakes, then the problem likely isn't just the lakes, it's the groundwater that feeds them.

Now, consider this metaphor applied to systemic racism:

- If one classroom in a school has poor outcomes for Black students, some might think the problem is with the students or teachers.
- If many classrooms in the school have poor outcomes for Black students, you might think that the issue is with the school itself.
- If many schools have poor outcomes for Black students, then the problem isn't just the schools, it's the policies and practices that shape the educational system itself.

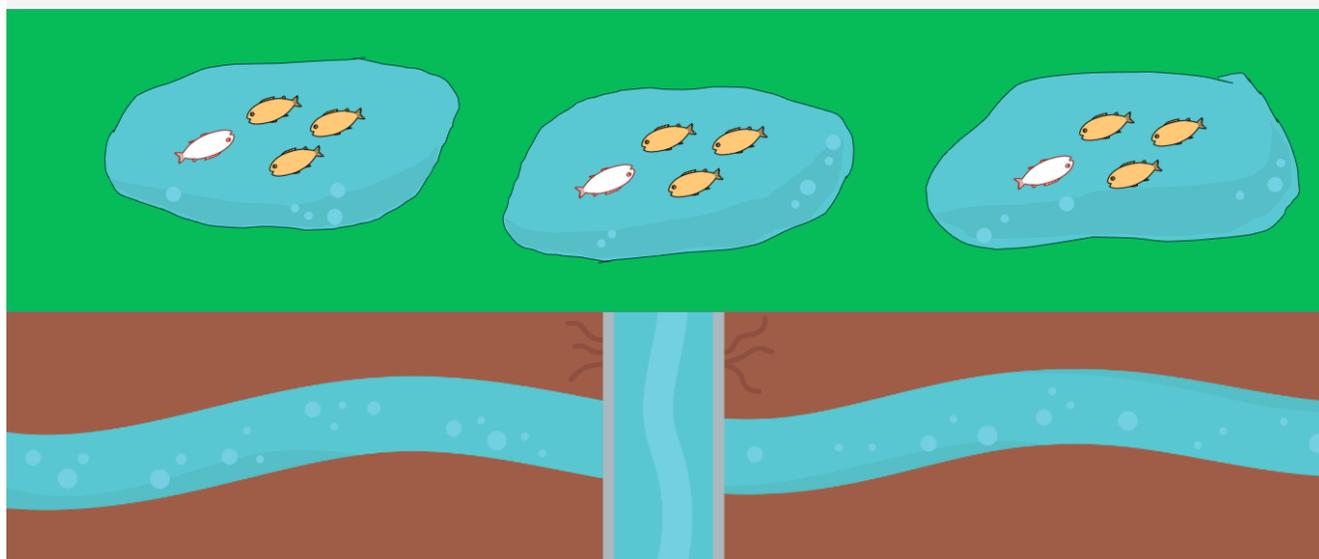
*Racism is
not just
something
we notice
on the
surface.*

Using this metaphor, we can see that racism is not just something we notice on the surface—it is deeply built into the rules and systems of society, much like groundwater flows beneath the earth. While this example focused on education, the groundwater metaphor also applies to other areas that shape people’s lives, such as housing, jobs, healthcare, and the justice system.

These unfair systems come from past injustices like slavery, segregation, and colonization, and they continue to create racial gaps and unfair treatment today.

Just like pollution in groundwater can spread and harm entire communities, systemic racism has widespread effects. It especially hurts people of color, keeping unfair patterns in place and making it harder for affected communities to succeed.

The Groundwater Metaphor



<https://racialequityinstitute.org/groundwater-approach/>

The groundwater metaphor reminds us that solving racism requires more than just addressing individual actions—it demands deep, systemic changes. By reforming policies, practices, and attitudes, we can break down unfair barriers and work toward real racial equity and justice.

Results-Based Accountability

The groundwater metaphor shows why we need to fix the deeper systems that cause racial inequality, not just the problems we see on the surface. But knowing this isn't enough—we need a clear plan to create real change.

[Results-Based Accountability](#) (RBA) gives us a way to track progress and make sure our efforts lead to real results. RBA is a data-driven framework that helps organizations measure the impact of their work and ensure that strategies are creating real change. A [2005 Harvard Family Research Project](#) study found RBA to be the only model suitable for both program planning and management. It helps organizations improve services, plan new projects, and track progress in community and economic development. RBA is widely used because it is clear, practical, and connects directly to budgeting, making it easier to sustain long-term change.

*We need
a clear
plan to
create real
change.*

Developed by Mark Friedman, Director of the Fiscal Policy Studies Institute, RBA begins with the end in mind. When using RBA, the main question is this: What are we trying to achieve? Rather than focusing on activities alone, RBA prioritizes tracking measurable improvements in people's lives. It does this by:

- Defining clear goals for community well-being.
- Identifying key challenges and barriers.
- Using data to track progress and adjust strategies accordingly.

RBA focuses not just on tracking efforts but on measuring real results. It also works at two connected levels: population accountability and performance accountability.

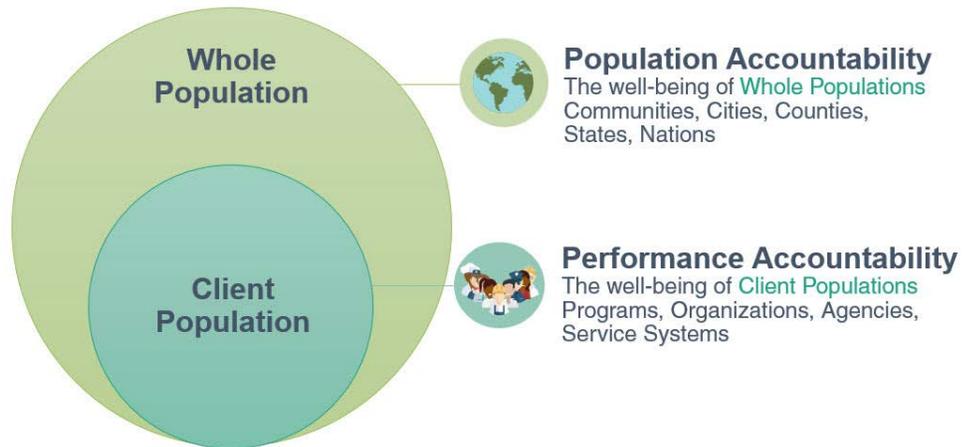
Population accountability looks at progress on a large scale, like reducing racial gaps in health, education, and job opportunities for whole communities. It encourages different groups to work together to create real change.

The second type of accountability is called performance accountability. It looks at how programs, services, or projects are improving results for the people they help. It measures how well they work by looking at things like efficiency, productivity, and changes in a person's behavior, knowledge, or skills.



Results-Based Accountability

is made up of **two parts**



source: <https://clearimpact.com/results-based-accountability/>

RBA focuses on using data to make decisions that speed up progress for communities (Population Accountability) or improve results for clients (Performance Accountability). It involves gathering, studying, and using data to track progress, spot trends, and adjust strategies as needed.

At the heart of RBA is a five-step process called “Turn the Curve” thinking. This process looks at data to measure progress toward goals and track the success of programs or services. It helps groups understand whether things are getting better, staying the same, or getting worse—and figure out what’s causing the changes.

RAPHC-C organized its work into five key areas, called pillars. In each pillar, decision-making was shared among co-chairs and strategists, who worked together to develop strategies. To make sure everyone understood the process, RAPHC-C trained co-chairs and strategists in RBA.

Each pillar followed the same process to keep things consistent. This process included:

- Choosing key data points (indicators) to guide planning.
- Identifying causes of racial and other demographic disparities and suggesting ways to address them.
- Deciding which strategies to use for each pillar.

[Clear Impact](#), an organization that specializes in RBA, worked with the five pillars to choose key data points (indicators) for measuring health differences. They used three scoring criteria: Communication Power, Importance Power, and Data Power. Participants rated the indicators using a shared Google sheet, which helped ensure everyone’s input was counted. Another sheet calculated the final score for each indicator.

Next, stakeholders joined Zoom meetings, each focused on one of the five pillars. Clear Impact shared data on the chosen indicators, including trends, tables, and maps. Participants used a process called “Turn the Curve” to study the data and figure out what was causing health disparities. A facilitator led discussions to identify problems and possible solutions.

The Turn the Curve process made sure different viewpoints were heard while keeping discussions focused. It helped participants reflect on data and understand how different factors—like race, gender, age, or location—contribute to health gaps. They also talked about which community groups could help fix these issues.

Finally, stakeholders met again to choose to recommend strategies using a similar scoring system. This time, they scored solutions based on Impact, Feasibility, Specificity, and Equity. After adding up the scores, strategists discussed which solutions to move forward with for each pillar.

Turn the Curve Thinking

Five questions to move from talk to action

01 | How Are We Doing?

02 | What Is the Story Behind the Curve?

03 | Who Are the Partners Who Have a Role in Turning the Curve?

04 | What Works to Turn the Curve?

05 | What Is Our Action Plan to Turn the Curve?

<https://clearimpact.com/results-based-accountability/>

<https://clearimpact.com/harvard-family-research-project-highlights-rba-strengths/>

The Five RAPHC-C Pillars and Participating Organizations

1

Criminal Justice

- ACLU of Ohio
- Cleveland Police Monitoring Team
- Cleveland State University
- NAACP
- NEON
- Prevention Research Center for Healthy Neighborhoods
- University Hospitals
- Western Reserve Area Agency for Aging

2

Education

- Case Western Reserve University
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District
- College Now Cleveland
- CSU Ohio
- Diocese of Cleveland
- Education Service Center of Northeast Ohio
- Greater Cleveland Career Consortium
- Step Forward
- The Centers for Family and Children
- The Cleveland Clinic Foundation
- Urban League of Greater Cleveland

4

Housing/Environment/ Infrastructure

- City of Cleveland
- Cleveland Foundation
- Enterprise Community Partners
- Fair Housing Center for Rights and Research
- Food Strong
- Greater Cleveland RTA
- PCs for People
- The Black Environmental Leaders
- The Trust for Public Land
- United Way Greater Cleveland
- Western Reserve Land Conservancy

3

Health/Public Health

- Asian Services in Action
- Benjamin Rose Institute
- Care Alliance
- Case Western Reserve University
- City Club of Cleveland
- Cleveland City Council
- Cleveland Clinic
- Cleveland Foundation
- Cuyahoga County Board of Health
- Mental Health Advocacy Coalition
- MetroHealth
- Neighborhood Family Practice

5

Workforce Development/ Economic Mobility/ Wealth Creation

- City of Cleveland
- Esperanza
- Fair Housing Center for Rights and Research
- Federal Reserve Bank of Cleveland
- Global Cleveland
- Ohio Means Jobs
- Team NEO

Clear Impact Scorecard

RAPHC-C plans to use the Clear Impact Scorecard to track progress and share updates on its strategic goals. The Scorecard is a tool that helps organizations measure success by setting clear goals, tracking data, and making informed decisions. It allows partners to work toward common goals, define key metrics, collect and review data, and adjust strategies as needed.

The Scorecard supports the RBA method, helping organizations track important community indicators that show progress toward big-picture goals. These measures should match organizational priorities and give useful insights into performance.

By showing progress and supporting data-driven decisions, the Scorecard helps organizations improve over time. It highlights areas that need attention and helps create stronger, more effective strategies.

DRAFT SCORECARDS FOR THE FIVE RAPHC-C PILLARS

Criminal Justice

[Scorecard for Criminal Justice Pillar of RAPHC-C](#)

Education

[Scorecard for Education Pillar of RAPHC-C](#)

Health/Public Health

[Scorecard for Housing-Environment-Infrastructure Pillar of RAPHC-C](#)

Housing/Environment/Infrastructure

[Scorecard for Health Pillar of RAPHC-C](#)

Workforce Development/Economic Mobility/Wealth Creation

[Scorecard for Workforce Development-Economic
Mobility-Wealth Creation Pillar of RAPHC-C](#)

1 RAPH-C Pillar for Criminal Justice

DESIRED RESULT:

All people of color in Cleveland experience justice when impacted by the criminal justice system

INDICATORS:

- Cuyahoga County Indictments for Offenses with Largest Numbers of Charges (2009-2018) by Race
- Cuyahoga County Sentencing Rates for Offenses with Largest Numbers of Charges (2009-2018) by Race

As part of Cleveland’s work to address systemic racism in the criminal justice system, pillar strategists have identified three key Criminal Justice Indicators to highlight larger problems: Racial Traffic Ticket Distribution Rates, Indictment Rates, and Sentencing Rates.

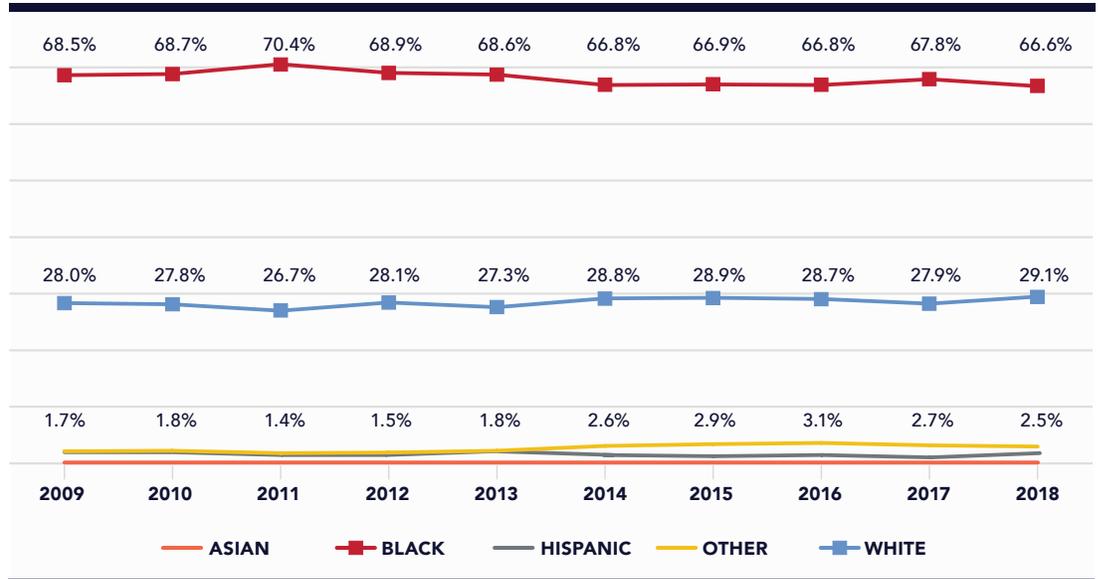
While data was only available for the last two, a deep dive using the Turn-the-Curve process uncovered important reasons for racial differences in charges and sentencing in Cleveland. Below are the information and key insights from partners using this process.

RAPH-C reviewed data for the following offenses, which had the highest number of charges across all categories in Cuyahoga County:

- Aggravated Assault
- Drug Trafficking
- Assault
- Felonious Assault
- Breaking & Entering
- Possession of a Controlled Substance
- Burglary
- Receiving Stolen Property
- Carry Concealed Weapon
- Robbery
- Domestic Violence
- Theft

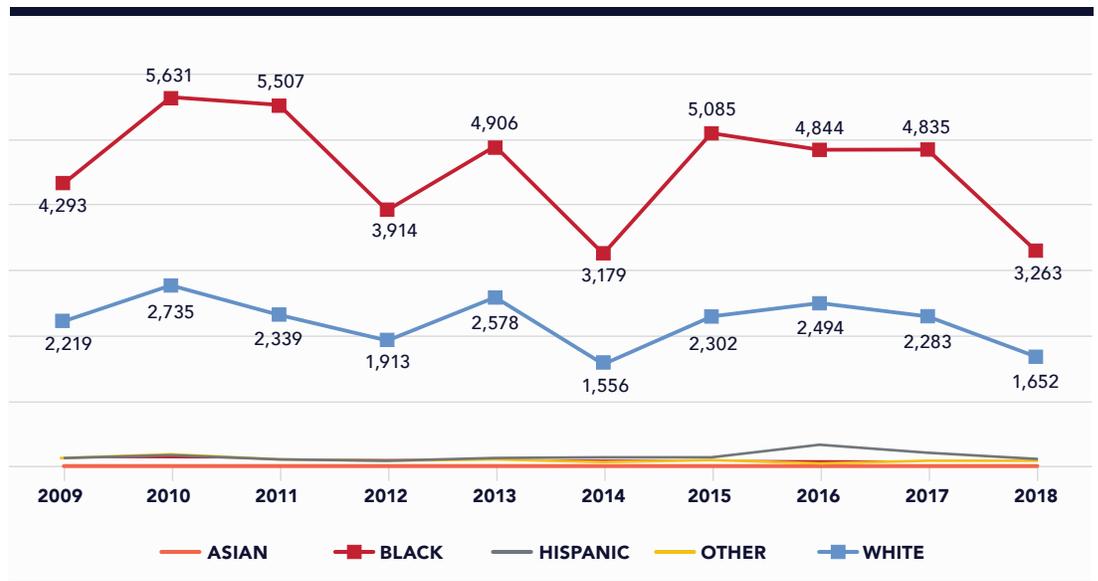


INDICATOR: Cuyahoga County Charges for Offenses with Largest Numbers of Charges by Race (2009-2018)



Source: Cuyahoga County Clerk Docket, 2021

INDICATOR: Cuyahoga County Sentencing Rates for Offenses with Largest Numbers of Charges by Race (2009-2018)



Source: Cuyahoga County Clerk Docket, 2021

One major reason for these racial differences is the impact of poverty-related issues, such as education, job opportunities, and mental health challenges. These problems affect African American communities the most. Some policies, like changing felony charges for crack pipe possession, have also increased differences in arrest and sentencing rates.

In addition, hidden biases among police, judges, and others in the justice system make racial gaps even worse. Systemic racism also plays a role by shaping how decisions are made, giving some people unfair advantages while others face harsher treatment. Political and institutional pressures also influence these decisions, allowing unfair practices to continue. This strengthens stereotypes and lets discrimination persist.

To fix these long-standing problems, RAPH-C strategists for criminal justice have suggested a number of solutions. One idea is to require the justice system to collect and share racial data to help find problems and hold officials accountable. Another is for city, county, and federal agencies to improve training on hidden bias for police, lawyers, and judges. Fair hiring practices in the justice system can also help reduce discrimination and make the system fairer for everyone.

Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

SHARE THE FACTS. Require police and courts to collect and share data, including traffic citations, criminal charges and sentencing rates by race.

EXPAND ALTERNATIVES TO JAIL. Create strong programs to help people charged with minor crimes instead of sending them to jail. These diversion programs should be a priority for people of color in the criminal justice system to ensure fairer treatment and better outcomes for individuals and the community.

TRAIN FOR FAIRNESS. Teach police, lawyers, and judges how to recognize and prevent unconscious bias.

REQUIRE ACCOUNTABILITY. Hold elected officials and law enforcement agencies publicly accountable for fair practices to help address systemic racism in Cleveland's criminal justice system.

2 RAPHC-C Pillar for Education

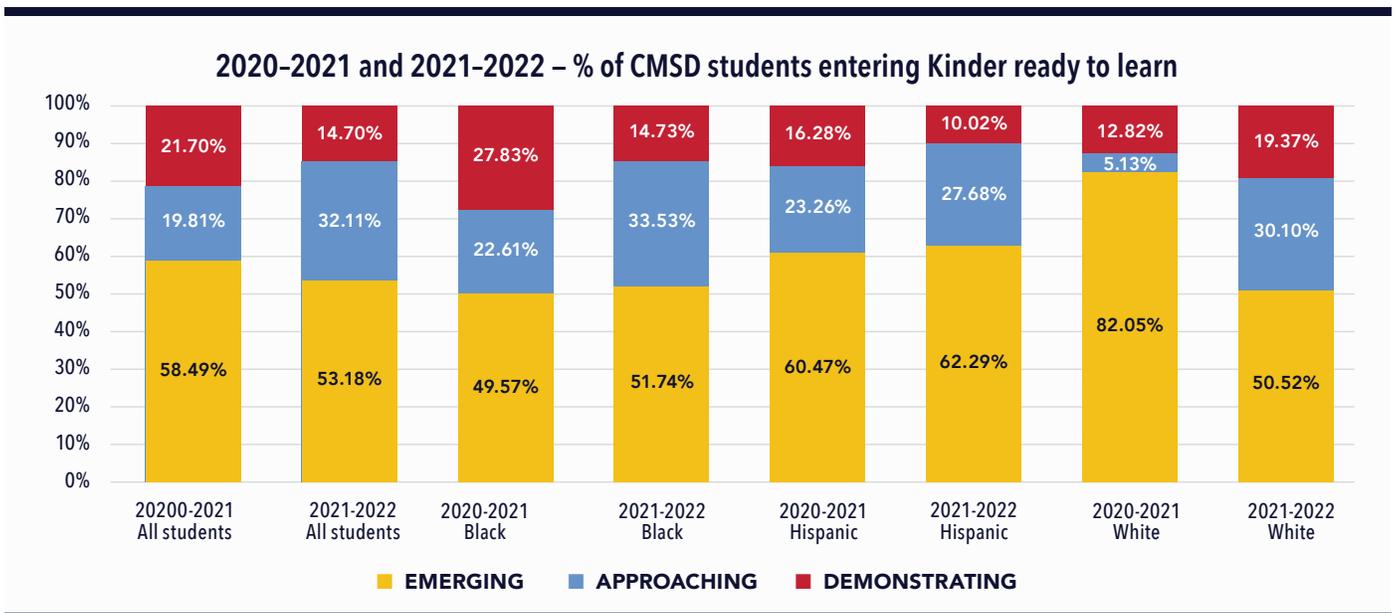
DESIRED RESULT:

All students of color in Cleveland are prepared for success after high school

INDICATORS:

- Kindergarten readiness rates in Cleveland Metropolitan School District students by race and ethnicity, as measured by the KRA-R
- 3rd grade reading proficiency in Cleveland Metropolitan School District students by race and ethnicity
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District students who graduate high school complete college within 6 years by race and ethnicity

INDICATOR: Kindergarten readiness rates in Cleveland Metropolitan School District students by race and ethnicity, as measured by the KRA-R



Source: Ohio Department of Education, Kindergarten Readiness Assessment – Revised report 2022

The Kinder Readiness Assessment-Revised (KRA-R) checks if children are ready for school based on Ohio’s Early Learning and Development Standards (from birth until children begin kindergarten). It measures what children know and can do in four key areas: Social Skills, Language and Reading, Math, and Physical Health and Motor Skills.

The KRA-R is not a regular paper-and-pencil test. Instead, it includes different activities, such as teachers observing students during daily tasks and asking them to answer questions or complete simple activities. In the Language and Literacy and Math sections, teachers and students work together on certain tasks, with students choosing answers or performing specific actions.

When looking at the data on Kinder readiness in Cleveland, stakeholders found troubling trends showing differences among racial and ethnic groups. While some areas have improved, overall Kinder readiness has gone down, and many students still do not meet the needed benchmarks. The data also shows that different racial and ethnic groups have different results, making it clear that focused efforts are needed to fix these unfair gaps.

The data shows a troubling trend: the percentage of students who were ready for kindergarten dropped from 2021 to 2022. While some areas improved—such as more students getting closer to readiness—gaps remain. For example, Black students saw a big drop in readiness rates, and Latino students continued to score lower than their peers. These gaps show the urgent need to find and fix the root causes of these differences.

Stakeholders have identified many reasons for the gaps in Kinder readiness. Some come from problems in early education systems, while others are linked to financial struggles faced by marginalized communities. Challenges like teacher shortages, low pay for early childhood educators, and limited access to high-quality prekindergarten programs make it harder for all children to start school on equal footing. In addition, the educational system itself is designed in a way that leads to unfair outcomes for different groups of students. A lack of training in culturally inclusive teaching makes these gaps even worse, especially for Black and Latino students.

To close these long-standing gaps, stakeholders have suggested several ways to make early education fairer and more welcoming. One key strategy is using teaching practices that support students' diverse backgrounds and help all children feel included in the classroom. Other steps include helping families find affordable prekindergarten programs and making sure students have important resources like personal learning devices and books. In addition, improving teacher training, hiring more educators of color, and offering more support services for families can help create a fairer learning environment.

To fight systemic racism in early education, stakeholders are focusing on practical and targeted strategies that have the biggest impact and promote fairness. These include improving teaching methods, so they reflect students' diverse backgrounds, making prekindergarten free or affordable for families in need, and expanding programs like the MetroHealth System initiative to support early literacy and help parents get involved. By using these strategies, stakeholders hope to remove unfair barriers and create equal opportunities for all students in Cleveland's early education system.

Improving teacher training, hiring more educators of color, and offering more support services for families can help create a fairer learning environment.

Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

INCREASE PRE-K ACCESS: Make free or low-cost, high-quality preschool available to all families.

TRAIN TEACHERS TO BE INCLUSIVE: Help teachers use culturally responsive teaching to better support students.

EXPAND MENTORSHIP & SUPPORT: Provide mentoring, emotional support, and trauma-informed care in schools and community centers.

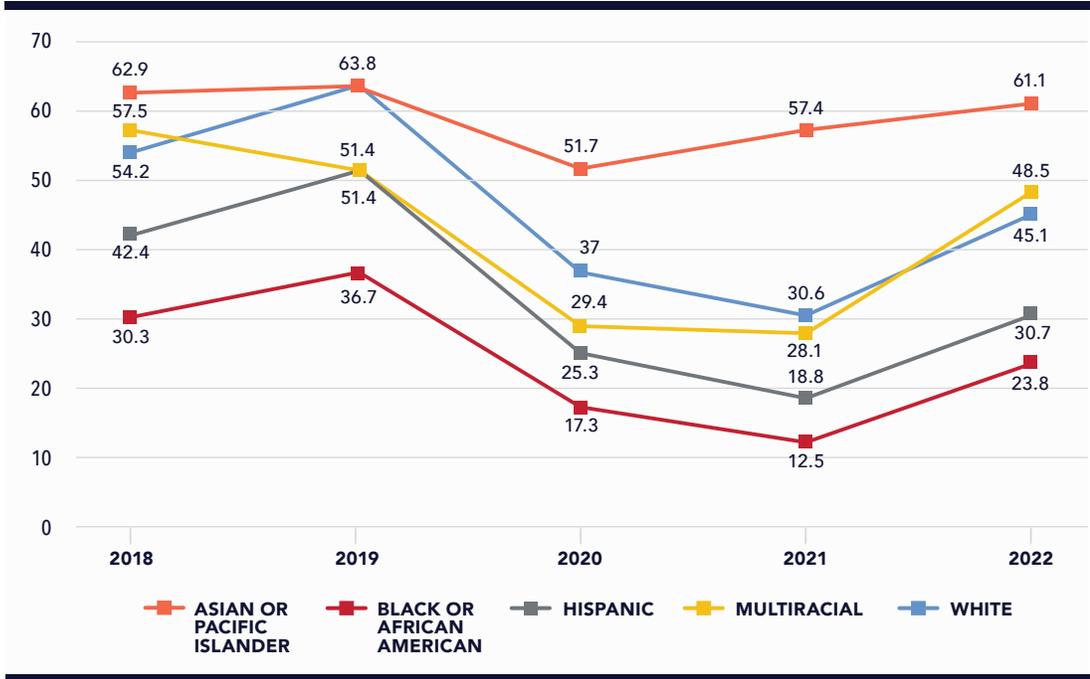
ENSURE TECHNOLOGY ACCESS: Give every child a personal learning device before kindergarten and teach them how to use it.

PROMOTE EARLY LITERACY: Encourage doctors and nurses to talk about reading with parents during children's wellness checkups.



Adobe Stock | #188222677

INDICATOR: 3rd Grade Proficiency for English Language Arts in Cleveland Metropolitan School District by Race, 2022



Source: Ohio Department of Education, 3rd Grade Proficiency for English Language Arts in Cleveland Metropolitan School District, 2022

When looking at 3rd-grade reading scores in Cleveland, stakeholders found big differences among racial and ethnic groups. The biggest concern is the decline in Black students' performance, showing unfair gaps in the early education system. While some groups have stayed the same or improved, the overall trends show an urgent need for focused solutions to close racial gaps in education.

Black students, in particular, are struggling more with 3rd-grade reading, showing that barriers in the system make it harder for them to succeed. Even though efforts have been made to improve overall reading scores, gaps remain, with Black and Hispanic students affected the most. Meanwhile, Asian or Pacific Islander students have had steady results, which means schools should look at what is helping them succeed and apply those lessons elsewhere.

Stakeholders have found several reasons why 3rd-grade reading scores differ among students. Systemic problems like too few teachers from diverse backgrounds, school materials that don't reflect all students, and unequal access to resources and support programs make it harder for some students to succeed. On top of that, poverty, lack of preschool access, and early childhood stress make these gaps even bigger, especially for students in underserved communities.

To address these systemic inequities, stakeholders have developed several solutions to improve educational outcomes. These include advocating for higher wages to reduce financial stress on parents, enabling them to be more present and engaged in their children’s learning, using child development research to improve teaching and learning, and measuring how well schools involve parents as a sign of their success. In addition, changing how we think about education and supporting policies that lower stress for families and teachers can help improve the system.

To address systemic racism in early education, stakeholders are focusing on strategies that have the biggest impact and are practical, clear, and fair. These include providing trauma-informed support for students, offering better training for teachers, and increasing emotional and social support for students, parents, and educators. By focusing on these strategies, stakeholders hope to remove unfair barriers and create equal opportunities for all students in Cleveland’s early education system.

Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

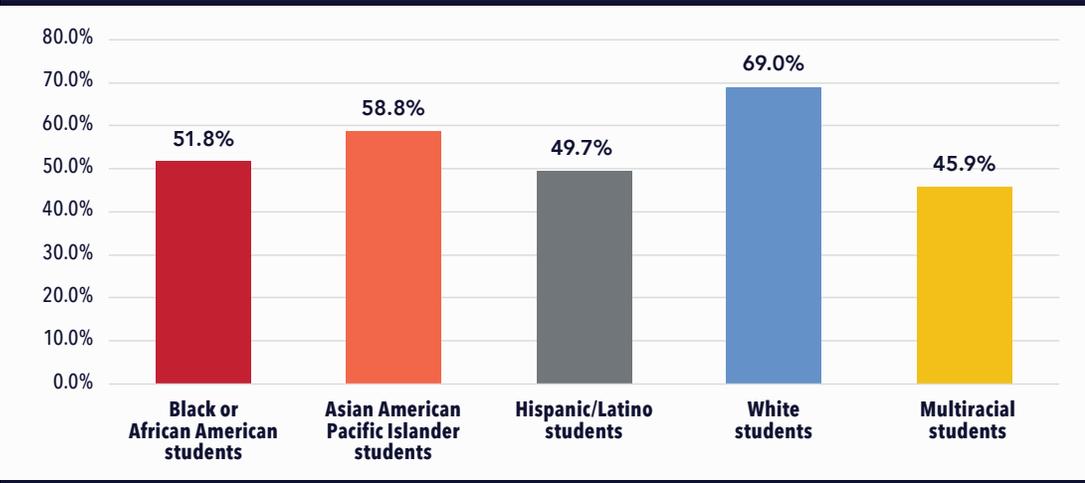
EXPAND MENTORSHIP & SUPPORT: Provide mentoring, emotional support, and trauma-informed care in schools and community centers.

ENSURE TECHNOLOGY ACCESS: Give every child a personal learning device before kindergarten and teach them how to use it.

PROMOTE EARLY LITERACY: Encourage doctors and nurses to talk about reading with parents during children’s wellness checkups.

SUPPORT TEACHER DEVELOPMENT: Provide better training for preschool through 3rd-grade teachers to improve reading instruction.

INDICATOR: % of Cleveland Metropolitan School District students who graduate HS and complete postsecondary education within 6 years by race and ethnicity



Source: National Student Clearinghouse Data High School Benchmarks Report, Fall 2022

An analysis of data on college completion in Cleveland shows major differences between racial and ethnic groups, especially with challenges from the pandemic. Asian and multiracial students are more likely to stay in school, while Black and Latino students face more obstacles, leading to lower graduation rates and widening existing gaps. Surprisingly, White students also have low college completion rates, showing that many factors affect student success.

Many factors affect whether students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds complete college. These include a lack of school support for minority students, discrimination, inadequate access to mentors and college prep programs, mental health struggles, and money problems. In addition, school policies, a lack of professors with similar backgrounds, and low expectations make it even harder for some students to succeed.

To close these gaps, stakeholders have suggested several solutions to make college more accessible and help more students succeed. These include offering advanced courses in earlier grades, adding racial equity training to teacher preparation and professional development, and providing more mentorship opportunities for students. In addition, educating parents and caregivers, hiring more diverse teachers, and creating career pathway plans can give students from underserved communities the support they need.

Additionally, forming strong partnerships with community groups, increasing support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), and implementing culturally responsive teaching that removes barriers and promotes equitable learning are essential to improving access and fairness in education. Schools should also review policies that create obstacles for students and ensure teacher training and curriculum reflect diverse perspectives to foster a more inclusive learning environment.

In conclusion, closing gaps in college success requires a broad plan that recognizes and removes the barriers students from underserved communities face. By using targeted programs, supporting fair policies, and creating a strong system of support, Cleveland can help ensure that all students have the same chance to succeed in college and beyond.

To address systemic racism in education and help more students complete college, schools should focus on strategies that are effective, practical, and fair. First, involving parents and caregivers early in their child's education helps to align learning with career goals and creates a strong support system. Second, offering career planning programs at the start of high school helps students make informed choices about their future.

Additionally, training teachers to understand different cultures and improve their teaching practices helps create fair and welcoming classrooms. Schools should also hold teachers accountable for making learning more inclusive. These strategies—focused on teamwork, early support, and fair teaching—can help remove barriers and give all students a better chance at completing college.

Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

ENGAGE PARENTS & CAREGIVERS EARLY: Involve families as active partners in students' education and career planning to align learning with long-term goals.

EXPAND CAREER PLANNING & EXPLORATION: Offer career exploration programs starting in high school to help students make informed decisions about their futures.

IMPROVE CULTURAL COMPETENCY IN TEACHING: Train educators in culturally responsive teaching and hold them accountable for creating inclusive learning environments.

STRENGTHEN MENTORSHIP & SUPPORT: Increase mentorship opportunities and expand access to college preparation programs for students from underserved communities.

3 RAPH-C Pillar for Health & Public Health

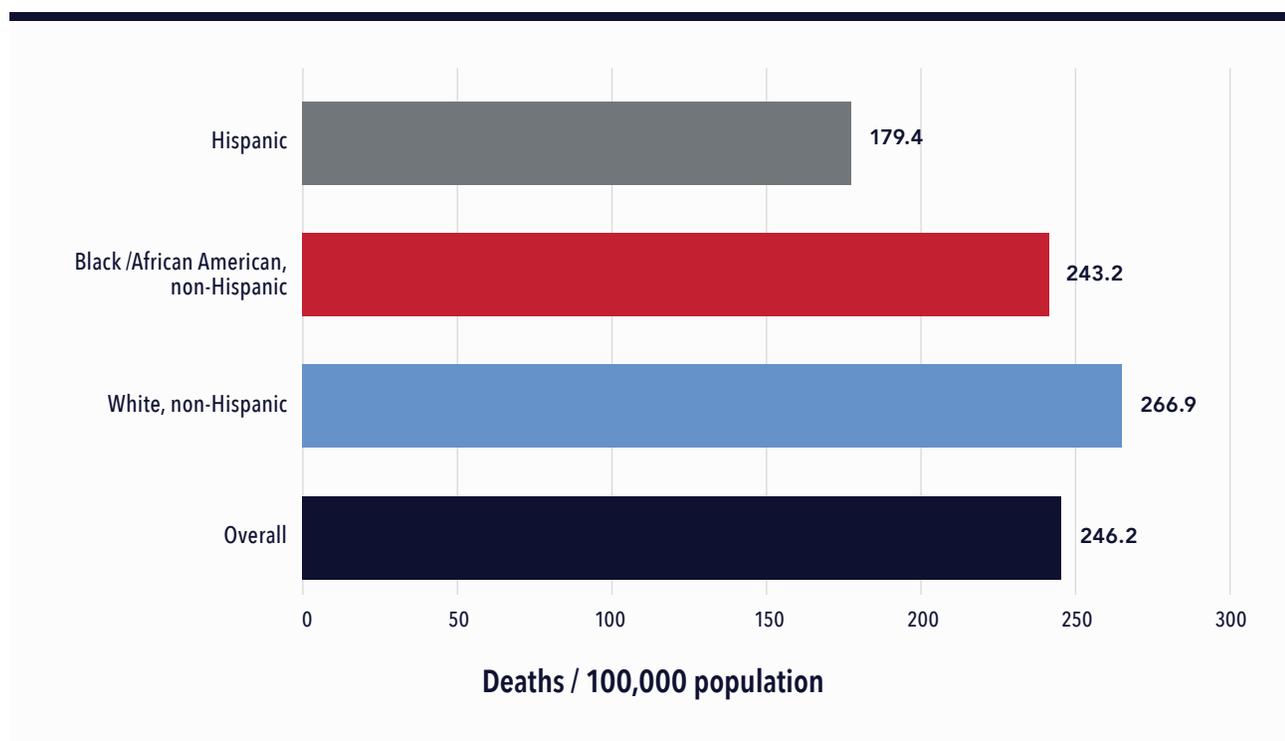
DESIRED RESULT:

All residents of color in Cleveland are healthy.

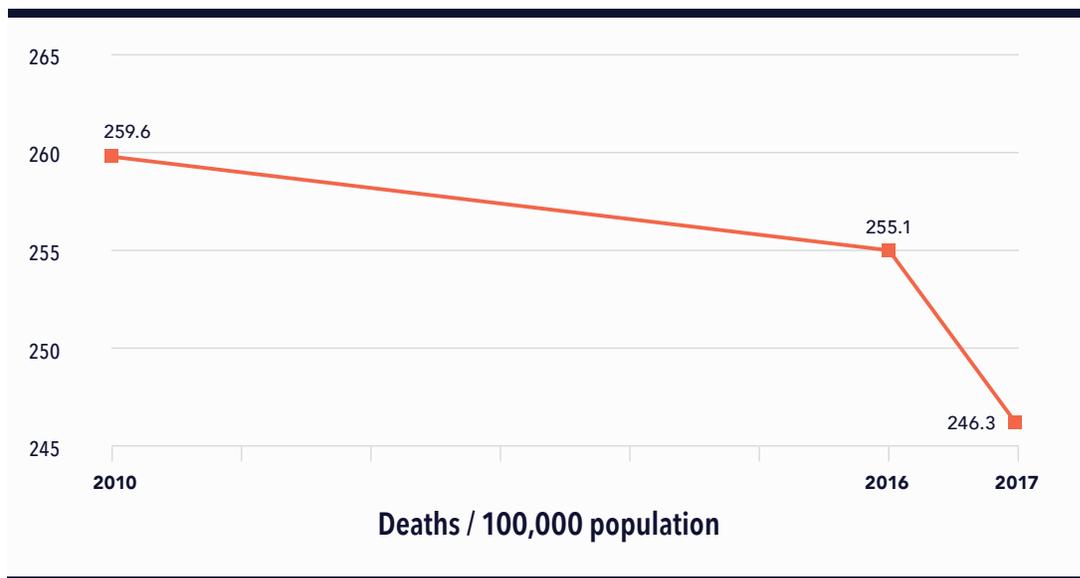
INDICATORS:

- Age-Adjusted Death Rate Due to Cardiovascular Disease
- Age-Adjusted Rate of Gun-Related Deaths
- Adult consumption of 5 fruits and vegetables on a daily basis

INDICATOR: Age-Adjusted Death Rate Due to Cardiovascular Disease



Source: CCBH using Vital Statistics provided by the Ohio Department of Health (2017)
Age-adjusted rate for "Other" is not presented due to instability (there are less than 20 cases total for the time period).



Source: CCBH using Vital Statistics provided by the Ohio Department of Health (2017)

The decline in the death rate from 2010 to 2017 suggests some progress in overall health, but it is unclear if this change is statistically significant. At the same time, research highlights a troubling pattern: Black or African American male youth face high rates of gun-related deaths, while Black men also have high rates of death from heart disease. This means many Black men die from violence before reaching the age when heart disease becomes a major risk. These findings underscore the urgent need for solutions that address the social factors driving health disparities in marginalized communities.

People of color experience higher death rates from heart disease, but the exact numbers are difficult to determine. Death records may contain errors due to reporting inaccuracies or unconscious bias among healthcare professionals. Beyond data challenges, social, economic, and environmental factors also contribute to heart health disparities. Limited access to transportation prevents people from reaching healthcare services and other essential resources. Predatory businesses target low-income neighborhoods with harmful tobacco products, while pollution and a lack of healthy food options increase health risks. Additionally, inequitable laws and policing practices create further barriers that disproportionately impact communities of color.

Gaps in the healthcare system further widen health disparities. Limited access to care, bias in treatment, and a shortage of Black primary care doctors make it harder for patients to receive culturally competent care, leading to distrust and poorer health outcomes. Other barriers, such as inconvenient office hours and poor doctor-patient communication, further limit access. Many people also lack essential health information, while chronic stress places added strain on their bodies, increasing the risk of heart disease. Addressing these challenges requires solutions that promote fair access to healthcare, culturally responsive medical care, and strong community support programs.

To improve heart health in Cleveland, solutions must address the root causes of health disparities. Laws that limit smoking and vaping can stop companies from unfairly targeting minorities and youth, reducing exposure to harmful products. Expanding clinic hours and increasing healthcare funding can help people access primary care sooner, making it easier to detect and manage heart disease risks early. Promoting health literacy and simplifying access to healthcare programs can empower residents to make informed decisions about their care. Hospitals and local communities should also work together by investing in public health initiatives, such as green spaces and community kitchens, to support healthier lifestyles. These strategies—focusing on policy, healthcare improvements, and community support—are key to ensuring better heart health for everyone in Cleveland.

Solutions should also improve individual healthcare experiences. Enhancing social support and communication in healthcare can make a meaningful difference in patient care. Expanding translation services can help patients and doctors communicate more effectively, breaking down language barriers. Training programs can equip both patients and healthcare providers with better communication skills to improve discussions about treatment and healthcare needs.

Investing in community health workers who live and work in neighborhoods can help connect residents with medical care and other critical resources. These workers provide more than just healthcare access—they also offer guidance, advocacy, and a trusted link between communities and the healthcare system.

To further improve individual care, solutions must emphasize cultural understanding and fair treatment. Pharmacy students can assist by conducting community-based medication reviews, helping patients manage prescriptions more effectively. Educating patients on their health history and treatment options can lead to better healthcare decisions. Healthcare systems should also improve care coordination, expand language services, and strengthen workforce training in urban primary care settings to reduce health disparities. These changes can make healthcare more inclusive, accessible, and effective for people of all backgrounds.

To further improve individual care, solutions must emphasize cultural understanding and fair treatment.



Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

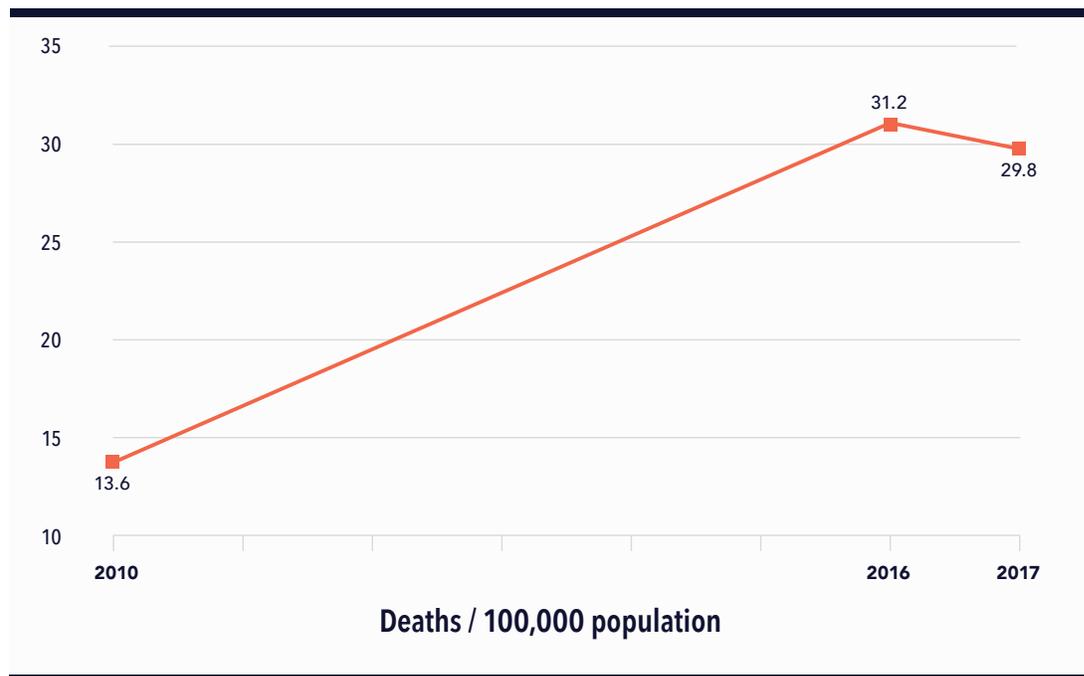
MAKE HEALTHCARE FAIR FOR EVERYONE: Train hospitals, doctors and all caregivers to provide culturally competent care that respects all people and fights racism.

INCREASE COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKFORCE: Hire and train more health workers to help people navigate the health care system and get the quality care they need.

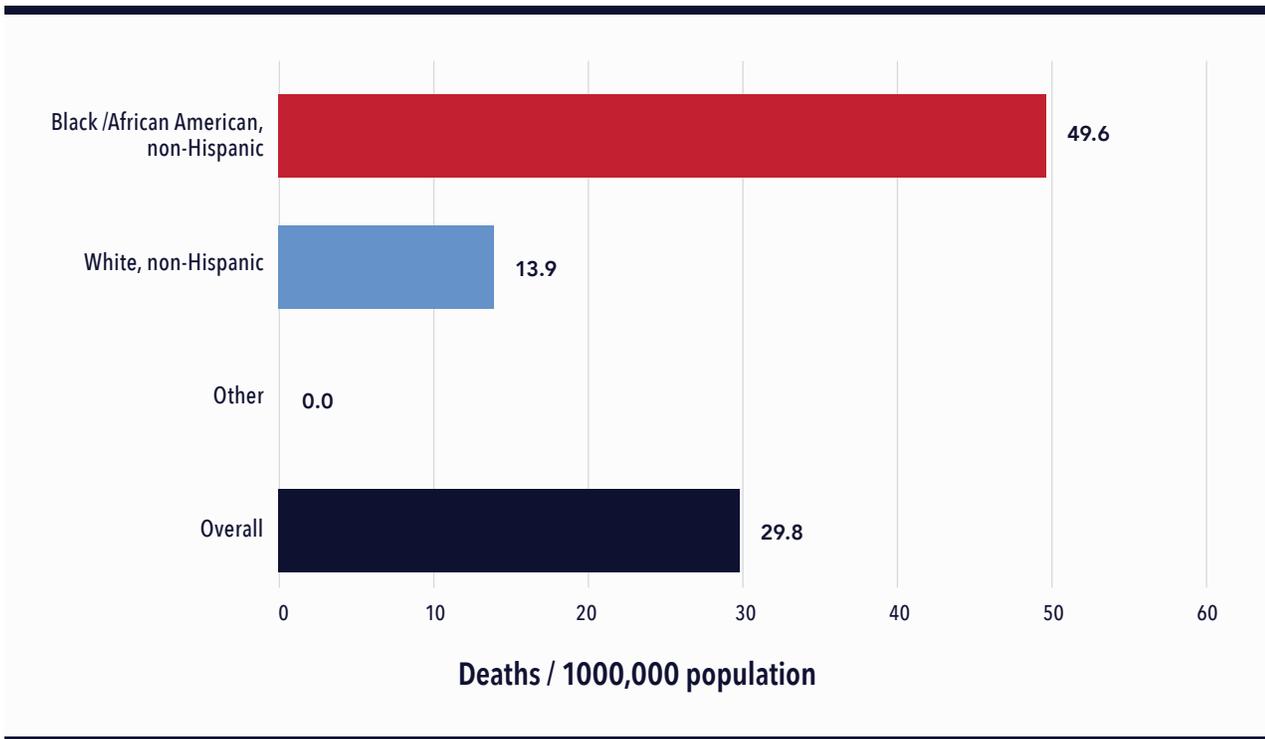
IMPROVE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE MEDICATION: Create programs to help people pay for their prescriptions.

HELP PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THEIR HEALTH: Teach patients about their health histories and the importance of screenings.

INDICATOR: Age-Adjusted Rate of Gun-Related Deaths



Source: CCBH using Vital Statistics provided by the Ohio Department of Health (2017)



Source: CCBH using Vital Statistics provided by the Ohio Department of Health (2017)
 Age-adjusted rate for "Hispanic" is not presented due to instability (there are less than 20 cases total for the time period).

Gun-related deaths in Cleveland are increasing, with Black or African American residents—especially those aged 18-34—disproportionately affected. This means young people in these communities face a higher risk of dying from gun violence. These statistics show the urgent need for targeted solutions to address the root causes of this issue.

Many factors contribute to differences in gun-related deaths in Cleveland. Easy access to both legal and illegal guns, childhood trauma, and drug availability all play major roles. Other challenges, like limited job opportunities for people leaving prison, childhood hunger made worse by limited SNAP/TANF funding, and a lack of trust in law enforcement, add to the problem. Racial discrimination and disinvestment in neighborhoods have led to deep poverty and fewer chances for people to get ahead, keeping cycles of violence, hardship and despair going.

Tackling these problems requires solutions that work together to improve individual lives and communities. At the community level, we need to change policies to fix larger issues, like enacting stronger gun laws, providing more funding for housing and social services, and creating better job opportunities to reduce poverty. We should also improve individuals' social needs by offering programs that prevent violence and help at-risk youth. And we need to improve direct care for people, such as mental health support and programs to help victims of gun violence. By addressing these issues at multiple levels—community, individual, and direct care—these strategies work together to create lasting change.

To reduce gun-related deaths, we must address systemic racism as a root cause and focus on solutions that are effective, practical, and fair. One approach is to train professionals in racial equity and trauma-informed care to ensure systems respond better to community needs. Another is to expand violence prevention programs and provide full support services that address the conditions leading to gun violence. Finally, working with survivors of violence as advocates and improving access to mental health care can help communities heal. These efforts can help Cleveland create safer, healthier neighborhoods for everyone.

Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

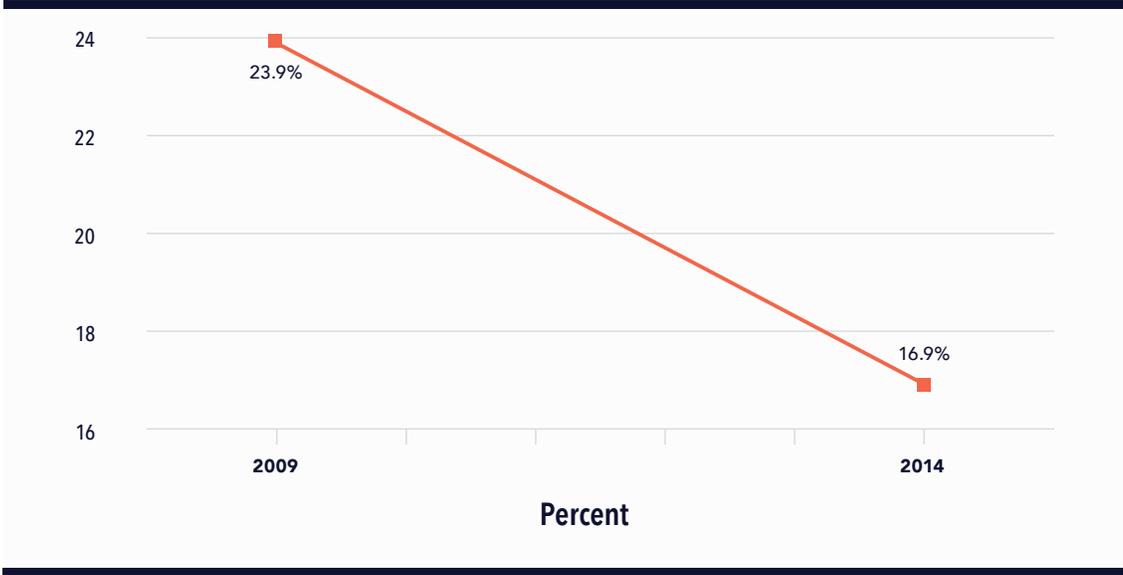
IMPROVE CRISIS RESPONSE & EQUITY TRAINING: Train professionals in crisis response, trauma care, racial equity, and cultural awareness to improve how systems handle gun violence.

EXPAND VIOLENCE PREVENTION PROGRAMS: Strengthen programs that stop violence before it happens, offering support to prevent conflicts from turning into gun-related incidents.

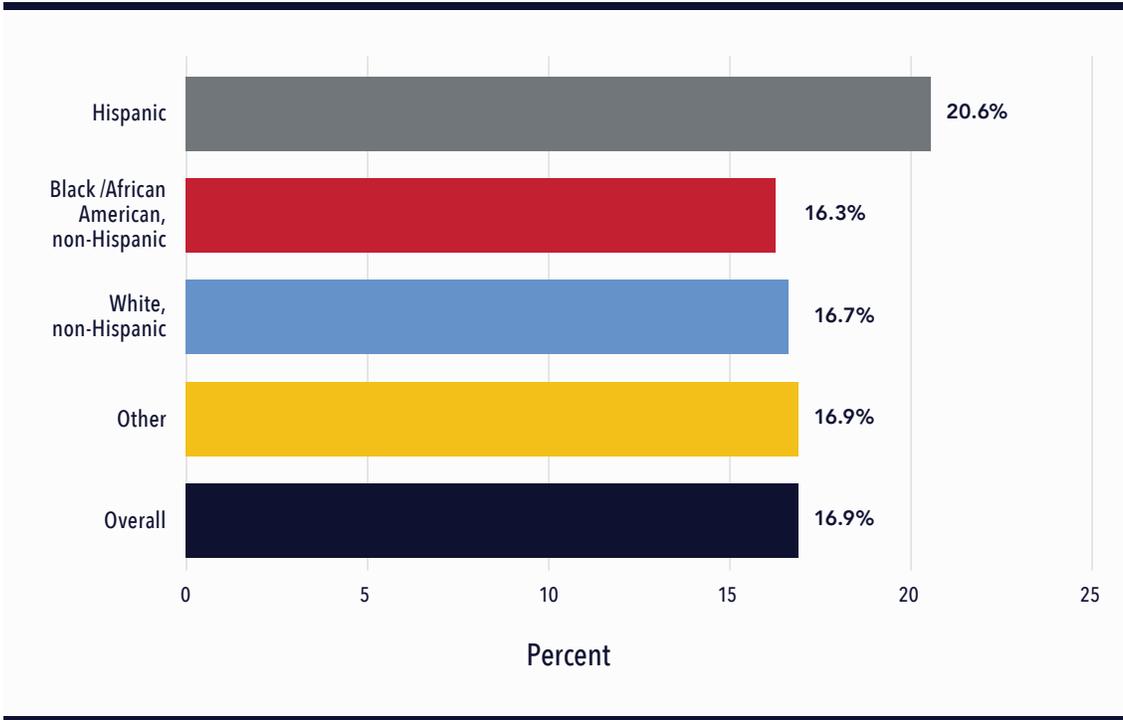
ENGAGE SURVIVORS AS COMMUNITY LEADERS: Work with gun violence survivors as advocates who help prevent future conflicts.

INCREASE ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH CARE: Provide free, high-quality mental health care, including youth programs, relationship education, mindfulness training, and women's health services, to support emotional well-being and reduce violence.

INDICATOR: Adult consumption of 5 fruits and vegetables on a daily basis



Source: Prevention Research Center for Healthy Neighborhoods (2014)



Source: Prevention Research Center for Healthy Neighborhoods (2014)

The available data does not fully show how much fresh food Clevelanders eat. However, many factors make it harder for people to eat enough fruits and vegetables. Fresh produce is expensive compared to unhealthy food, and cultural norms, limited access to grocery stores, and lack of time also play a role. Many people also don't feel confident in making healthy choices or don't have enough information about nutrition. These challenges affect low-income communities the most, reinforcing existing health gaps and making it harder to achieve better outcomes over time.

Improving access to healthy food and nutrition requires a comprehensive approach that strengthens communities, expands social support, and provides direct assistance to individuals. At the community level, policies should eliminate food deserts, limit the spread of fast-food locations, and make fresh, healthy foods more affordable through financial incentives and better public transportation to grocery stores. Schools, healthcare providers, and community programs should play a role in educating people about nutrition, helping families develop healthier eating habits, and strengthening partnerships with local food providers. Additionally, more resources should be invested in public education campaigns, community cooking classes, and programs that ensure fresh food is accessible to people of all abilities. Training healthcare workers on the importance of nutrition and culturally responsive care can further help break down barriers to healthy eating. By addressing food access at multiple levels—community, social, and individual—these strategies work together to reduce health disparities and promote long-term well-being for all residents.



Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

SUPPORT SMALL FOOD RETAILERS IN SELLING HEALTHY OPTIONS: Enact policies in Cleveland and Cuyahoga County to expand programs like Good Food Here, helping small store owners stock and sell nutritious foods.

PROMOTE FOOD AS MEDICINE IN HEALTHCARE: Shift the perspective in the medical community to recognize food as a key part of treatment and overall health, integrating nutrition into healthcare practices.

STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH LOCAL FARMS: Build stronger connections between healthcare, community organizations, and local or regional farms to increase access to fresh, healthy food.

PROVIDE CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE COOKING EDUCATION: Train Community Health Workers to teach cooking classes that reflect cultural traditions and help people prepare healthy meals in ways that are familiar and accessible.

REMOVE BARRIERS TO HEALTHY EATING: Identify and address specific challenges individuals face in accessing nutritious food, including physical limitations, economic hardship, and lack of transportation.

IMPROVE ACCESS TO FREE AND LOW-COST MEALS: Work with food networks to assess how they distribute meals, ensuring they reach individuals and families who need them most.

4 RAPHC-C Pillar for Housing, Environment, and Infrastructure

HOUSING

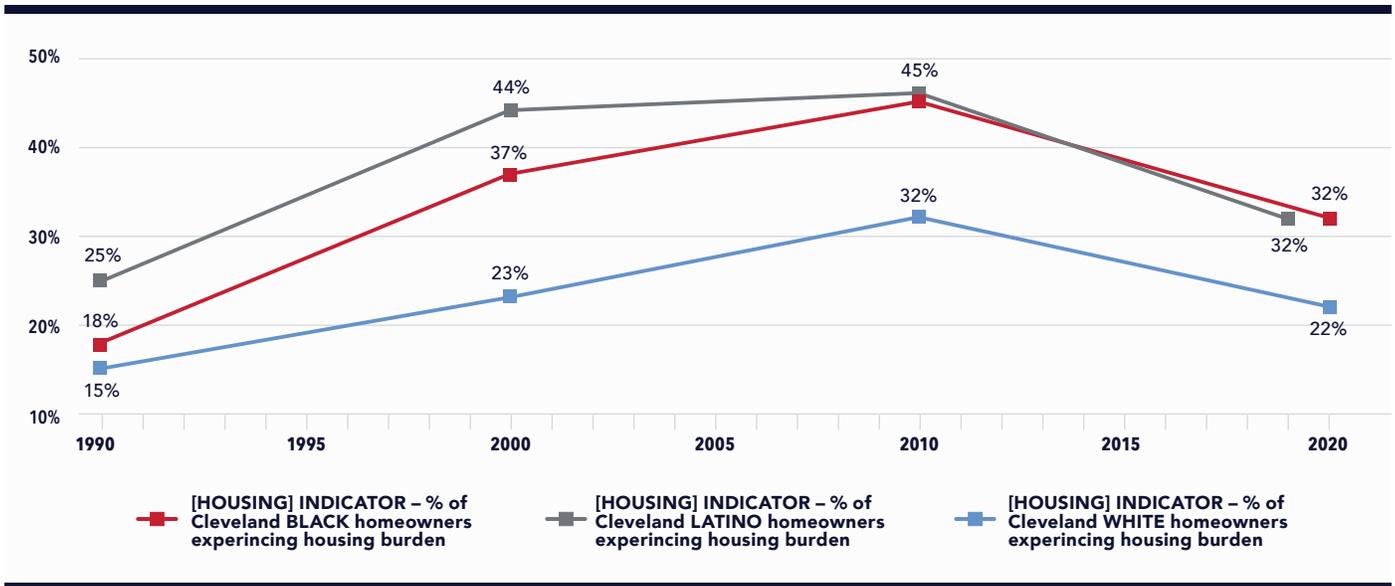
DESIRED RESULT:

All residents of color in Cleveland are living in a safe, affordable, and high-quality home accessible to mobility options

INDICATOR:

% of Cleveland homeowners experiencing housing burden, disaggregated by race and ethnicity

INDICATOR: % of Cleveland homeowners experiencing housing burden, disaggregated by race and ethnicity



Data source: IPUMS USA/National Equity Atlas by PolicyLink

Many connected factors are making racial disparities worse in Ohio, especially in cities like Cleveland. In recent years, public conversations about race have changed, allowing racist beliefs to be expressed more openly and acted upon. This has led to more discrimination in housing, jobs, and economic opportunities.

At the same time, financial crises—like the foreclosure crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic—have made it harder for people of color to find stable housing. The closure of large housing units, job losses in industries with many Black and brown workers, and unfair lending practices have caused financial instability. As a result, fewer Black and brown residents own homes, and many struggle with rising housing costs and debt.

Income inequality and unfair lending continue to make racial disparities worse. Past and recent financial crises have hit communities of color the hardest, making it even more difficult for them to build wealth and secure housing. To fix these problems, we need to address racism in housing, promote fair economic policies, and provide direct support to struggling communities in Ohio and beyond.

Despite these challenges, some programs and policies have helped reduce housing disparities in Cleveland. Federal funding for home repairs and energy efficiency improvements has lowered utility costs and created new jobs. Legal protections, like Cleveland's 1995 ban on high-cost mortgages, along with homeowner counseling programs from groups like ESOP, have helped many residents negotiate better mortgage terms. These efforts—both through policy and community programs—have improved financial stability and reduced housing inequality.

A growing concern in Cleveland is the rise of out-of-state investors buying homes, especially on the East Side—without keeping them in good condition. These neglected properties lower home values and make it harder for residents to build wealth or qualify for mortgages. Expanding affordable home repair programs can help homeowners take care of their properties. Partnering with universities to provide homeownership education—including to those in prison, can also give residents the knowledge and resources to maintain their homes. Exploring different housing options, such as shared housing for single mothers or elderly residents, can strengthen communities by creating more support networks. Moving away from isolated living and encouraging neighbors to help one another can improve social connections and make neighborhoods stronger.

Along with community efforts, policy changes are needed to fix the root causes of housing inequality. Updating the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) can encourage banks to offer more home loans in low-income areas, making homeownership more accessible. Speeding up the process of fixing or rebuilding vacant homes can help restore neighborhoods. Down payment assistance programs and homebuyer education can help more people enter the housing market. Expanding partnerships between the government and banks can also make home purchase and repair loans easier to get. Stronger property appraisal rules, better job opportunities for Black and brown workers, and more funding for affordable housing are important steps toward fairer homeownership. Finally, policies like raising the minimum wage and creating fair housing rules can ensure all residents have access to safe, affordable housing.

By improving housing policies, investing in communities, and providing better support, Cleveland can build stronger neighborhoods and make homeownership more accessible for everyone.

Policies like raising the minimum wage and creating fair housing rules can ensure all residents have access to safe, affordable housing.

Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

CONTINUE PROACTIVE PROPERTY TAX ASSISTANCE: Encourage the new county administration to maintain its recent efforts to help homeowners manage property tax delinquency through payment plans and other support programs.

IMPROVE COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT ACT (CRA) LENDING POLICIES: Implement changes at the municipal and county levels to make it easier and more attractive for banks to offer mortgages in low-income communities.

EXPAND ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOME REPAIR PROGRAMS: Provide low-cost home repair products and services to help homeowners maintain their properties and preserve housing stability.



ENVIRONMENT

DESIRED RESULT:

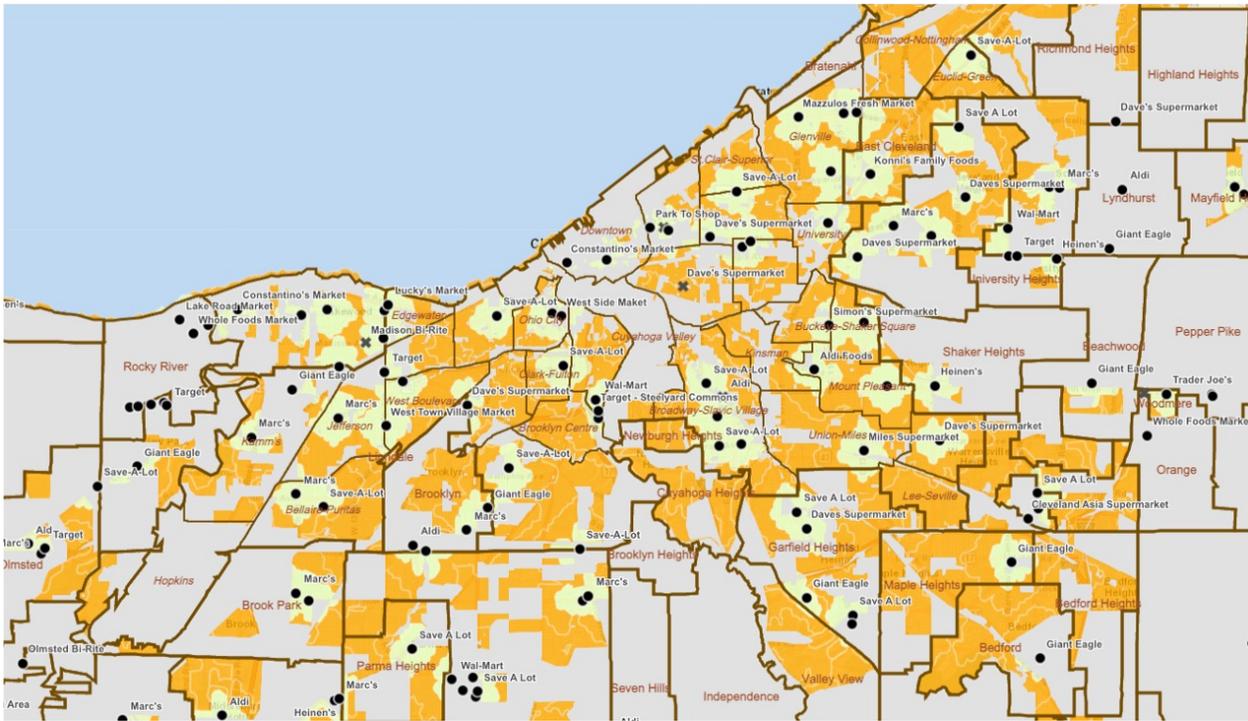
All residents of color in Cleveland live in an environment that is healthy and safe

INDICATOR:

% of Cleveland residents with access to healthy food options.*

*As a proxy for this indicator, stakeholders assessed a 2019 map produced by the Cuyahoga County Planning Association that depicts supermarket access for the region.

INDICATOR: Supermarket Access Map for the City of Cleveland



Source: Cuyahoga County Planning Commission 2019

Many factors limit access to healthy food for people of color in Cleveland. One major issue is that nutritious food options are not available near schools and senior centers, making it harder for families to get the food they need. The history of redlining has made this problem worse by preventing communities of color from accessing financial resources, which has led to fewer grocery stores in these neighborhoods. Over time, the lack of fresh food has lowered demand, creating a cycle where grocery stores see no reason to invest in these areas. Additionally, some chronic health issues, like high blood pressure and diabetes, are often viewed as a normal part of urban life rather than as preventable conditions.

Many decision-makers do not fully understand how systemic racism and social justice issues contribute to health inequities.

Another challenge is that many decision-makers do not fully understand how systemic racism and social justice issues contribute to health inequities. This lack of awareness allows harmful stereotypes to persist and limits efforts to improve access to healthy food. Solving these issues requires changes in policy, better education for lawmakers and healthcare workers about systemic racism, and more investment in communities that lack grocery stores and fresh food options.

Despite these challenges, several programs are helping expand access to nutritious food in Cleveland. Initiatives like the Beginning Farmer Program at Central State University and community-based projects, such as food pantries and urban farming ventures like Rid-All, are increasing the availability of fresh produce. Documentaries and social media campaigns are also raising awareness about the health risks of fast food and the benefits of plant-based diets, making healthy eating more popular.

Other programs, such as Produce Perks, help low-income families buy fresh food by doubling SNAP benefits for produce purchases. Schools are also playing a role by offering free breakfast and lunch, while mobile food markets and nutrition clinics make it easier for families to access healthy meals. Grassroots organizations and healthcare providers are working together to provide education, screenings, and support to encourage better eating habits in communities that need it most.

A variety of solutions can help increase access to nutritious food in Cleveland. Schools can bring back home economics, culinary arts, and gardening programs to teach children and families how to grow and cook healthy meals. A city-run coupon or voucher program—possibly linked to recycling efforts—could make fresh produce more affordable. Creating a regional organization to oversee vacant land programs and ensuring that Black and brown communities are involved in decision-making can help promote fair land use and food access.

Additional efforts, such as providing free cookbooks and online cooking classes, distributing fresh produce at schools, and offering bigger incentives for grocery stores to open in underserved areas, can further support healthier communities. Farm-to-school programs that require balanced meals and support local farmers can also make a difference. Encouraging land ownership for community gardens and adding hydration stations in schools will help create lasting changes in the city's food environment.

Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

COORDINATE LAND USE EFFORTS ACROSS CLEVELAND: Establish a regional organization to align vacant land programs, create a Green Community Land Trust for food production, and promote land ownership for community gardening and urban agriculture.

ENGAGE SCHOOL SYSTEMS TO PROMOTE HEALTHY EATING: Reintroduce home economics, culinary arts, and gardening programs while implementing farm-to-school meal programs that provide balanced, nutritious options.

LAUNCH A CITY-ENDORSED FOOD & RECYCLING VOUCHER PROGRAM: Provide financial incentives for purchasing fresh produce by linking food credits to recycling efforts.

EDUCATE POLICYMAKERS AND HEALTHCARE WORKERS ON SYSTEMIC RACISM: Train leaders in racial equity and cultural sensitivity to ensure Black and brown voices are included in decision-making.



INFRASTRUCTURE

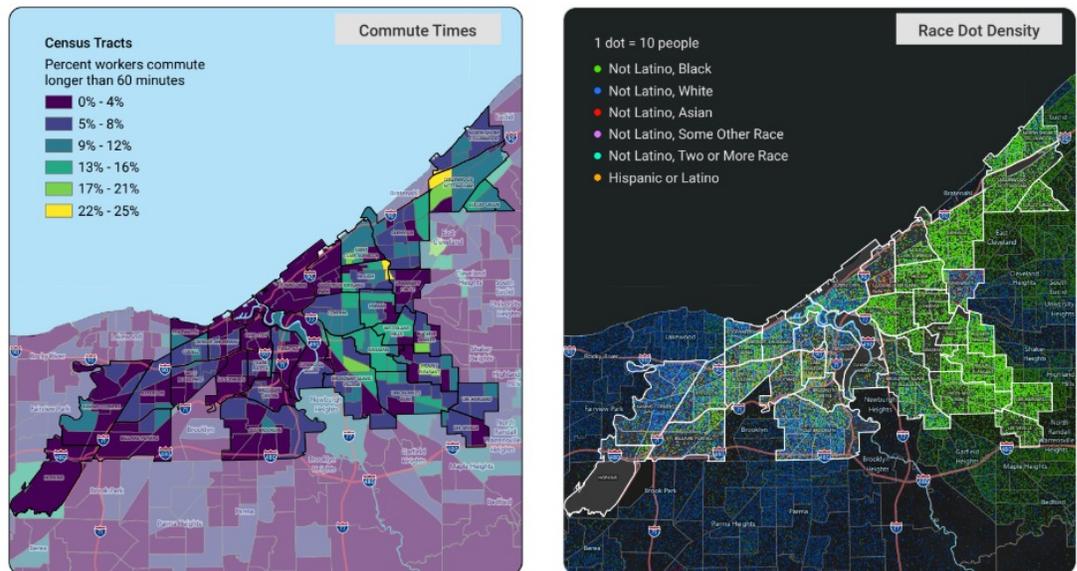
DESIRED RESULT:

All people of color in Cleveland experience an effectively functioning infrastructure

INDICATORS:

- Commute Times versus Race Density for Cleveland (proxy for % of Cleveland residents with access to high-frequency transit)
- Cleveland households without an internet subscription for broadband of any type, filtered by Percent Black or African American (proxy for % of Cleveland residents with broad band access)

INDICATOR: Commute Times versus Race Density for Cleveland



Both figures produced by the Cleveland City Planning Commission

Figure 1 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 5-Year Estimates 2015-2019

Figure 2 Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census 2020

Despite available public transit options in Cleveland, many communities of color—especially Black residents—face significant barriers in reaching jobs and essential services. Black workers make up a large portion of transit commuters, yet transit routes do not always serve their needs. In many predominantly Black neighborhoods, particularly on the East Side, residents must travel longer distances to access employment opportunities. Although high-frequency transit options exist, they are often disconnected from job centers, making it harder for people to find reliable transportation to work. These challenges highlight deeper systemic issues in how transit access and job opportunities are distributed.

Many of these transit disparities stem from decades of discriminatory policies and systemic disinvestment. Redlining, urban sprawl, and exclusionary housing policies have prevented Black communities from building wealth and securing access to reliable transportation. As a result, poverty has become more concentrated, and public transit options remain limited in these areas. Additionally, a lack of representation in urban planning decisions means that the voices of Black and brown residents are often left out when designing transit routes and infrastructure. Long-term disinvestment in predominantly Black neighborhoods has led to aging infrastructure, fewer transit routes, and unreliable service, making it even harder for residents to connect to jobs, healthcare, and other essential services.

Solving these challenges requires bold, equity-driven solutions. Expanding funding for public transit and increasing the number of high-frequency routes can improve access for underserved communities. Better land use planning—coordinating transit with job centers, housing, and green spaces—can create more connected and sustainable neighborhoods. It is also essential to invest directly in historically disinvested communities and involve local residents in transportation planning decisions. When residents have a voice in shaping transit policies, they can help ensure that public transportation serves their needs more effectively.

By focusing on strategies that prioritize impact, feasibility, and equity, Cleveland can build a more fair and accessible transit system that serves all residents, regardless of race or income level. Addressing systemic inequalities in transportation requires collaboration among city leaders, planners, and the communities most affected. With targeted investments and a commitment to inclusive planning, Cleveland can create a transit system that connects residents to opportunity and supports a more sustainable and equitable future for all.

Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

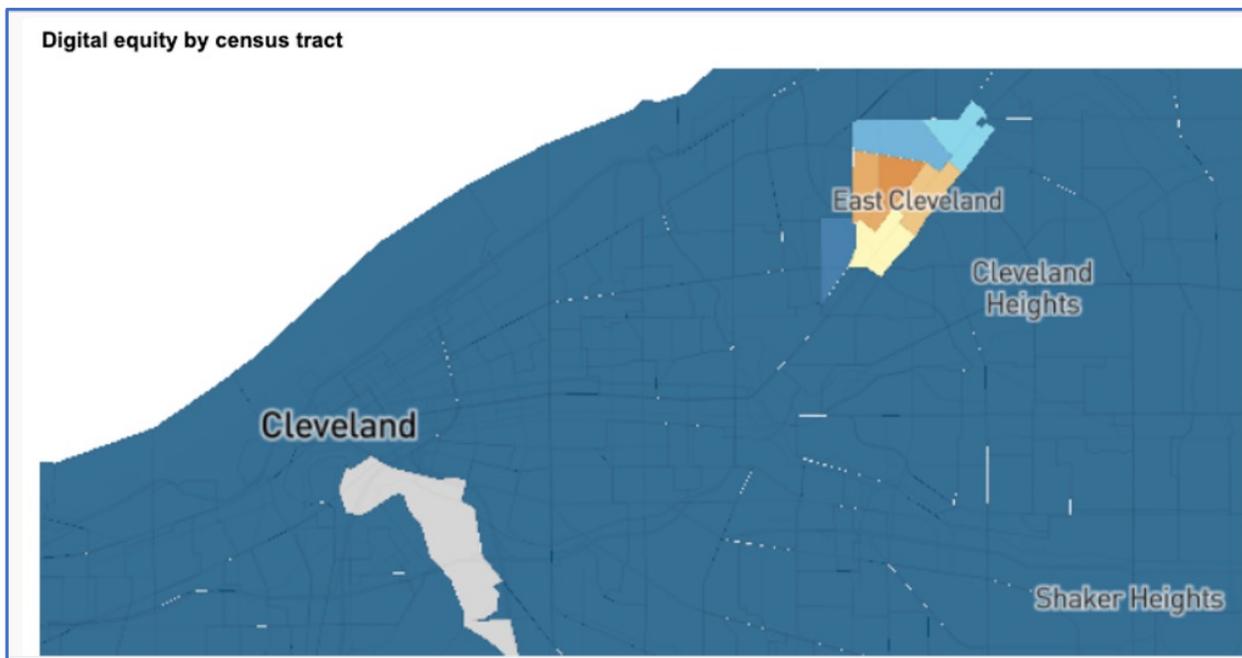
RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

IMPROVE PUBLIC TRANSIT: Increase funding to make rides cleaner, safer, and more reliable. Expand high-frequency routes to cover more areas, including nights and weekends, for easier transfers and faster commutes.

PLAN LAND USE ACROSS REGIONS: Work beyond Cleveland's borders to connect jobs, housing, and green spaces, ensuring better access and economic growth.

INVEST IN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES: Focus on raising incomes and wealth so residents can invest in their own neighborhoods through homeownership and local business development.

INDICATOR: Cleveland households without an internet subscription for broadband of any type, filtered by Percent Black or African American



Map is a screenshot from Microsoft Power BI project on Digital Equity in Ohio

Includes US Census Data: 2019 American Community Survey; Internet Service Provider data from BroadbandNow

Broadband internet is essential, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic exposed gaps in access across communities. In Cleveland, internet availability varies widely, with price increases causing significant drops in subscriptions. Areas that were historically redlined—especially those with large African American populations—still face broadband disinvestment, making internet access more difficult. However, there have been improvements. In Cuyahoga County, the percentage of people without internet dropped from 17% in 2019-2020 to 12% in 2022. Despite this progress, challenges remain, including internet service providers overselling coverage and fewer people in low-income areas subscribing due to cost concerns.

The reasons for these disparities are rooted in history and economics. Many areas without broadband today are the same communities that faced redlining and disinvestment in the past. This connection between broadband access and economic status means that lower-income areas often have fewer service options. Additionally, federal laws do not require companies to provide broadband in low-income neighborhoods, and providers tend to invest in areas where homeownership rates are higher. Poverty also plays a major role, as cities with higher poverty levels have fewer households with paid broadband subscriptions.

Addressing these gaps requires targeted solutions that focus on equity and accessibility. One key step is creating state-level oversight agencies to ensure fair broadband distribution at the local level. Expanding neighborhood-wide Wi-Fi networks and providing internet access at community centers can help underserved residents stay connected. Training digital navigators to assist users in choosing affordable broadband plans and learning how to use online services can empower communities. Additionally, updating broadband access maps and working with internet providers to identify and close service gaps—while offering financial incentives when needed—can improve connectivity for all.

By focusing on solutions that are effective, realistic, and fair, Cleveland can help bridge the digital divide and ensure that all residents have reliable internet access. Through collaboration with policymakers, internet providers, and community organizations, the city can create a more inclusive and connected future where broadband access is no longer a barrier to opportunity.

Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

MAKE BROADBAND FAIR: Push for a state agency to make sure internet access is fair in all communities.

EXPAND FREE WI-FI: Bring more public Wi-Fi to neighborhoods, including community centers.

HELP PEOPLE GET ONLINE: Train workers to teach people how to use the internet and choose the best options.

FILL INTERNET GAPS: Update maps to show where internet access is missing and work with companies to fix the problem.

5 RAPHC-C Pillar for Workforce Development, Economic Mobility, and Wealth Creation

DESIRED RESULT: All residents of color in Cleveland experience upward economic mobility and build generational wealth

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INDICATOR: Pillar strategists were unable to identify indicators at the scale of Cleveland or Cuyahoga for workforce development. This will be a focus for the group as it moves forward.

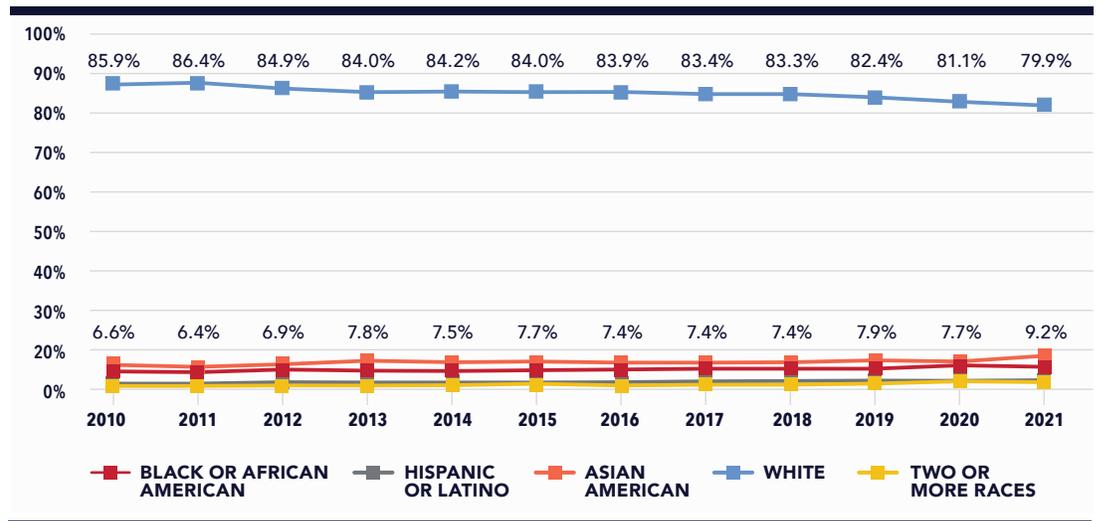
ECONOMIC MOBILITY INDICATOR: % of workers in Cuyahoga County experiencing wage growth, disaggregated by race and ethnicity

- Economic Mobility Proxy 1: Percentage of workers employed in the top 20 paying occupations in Cuyahoga County disaggregated by race and ethnicity
- Economic Mobility Proxy 2: Percentage of workers employed in the 20 lowest paying occupations for Black or African American workers in Cuyahoga County disaggregated by race and ethnicity

WEALTH CREATION INDICATOR: Number of owner-occupied households in Cuyahoga County

ECONOMIC MOBILITY

PROXY INDICATOR 1: PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS EMPLOYED IN THE TOP 20 PAYING OCCUPATIONS IN CUYAHOGA COUNTY DISAGGREGATED BY RACE AND ETHNICITY



Source: Emsi occupation employment data are based on final Emsi industry data and final Emsi staffing patterns. Wage estimates are based on Occupational Employment Statistics (QCEW and Non-QCEW Employees classes of worker) and the American Community Survey (Self-Employed and Extended Proprietors). Occupational wage estimates are also affected by county-level Emsi earnings by industry/

Proxy Indicator 2 for Wage Growth: Percentage of workers employed in the 20 lowest paying occupations for Black or African American workers in Cuyahoga County disaggregated by race and ethnicity

Race/Ethnicity	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Black or African American	23.7	24.3	24.5	25.0	25.1	25.2	25.6	25.5	25.1
Hispanic or Latino	4.7	4.9	5.0	5.2	5.4	5.9	5.7	5.9	6.2
AAPI	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.6	2.8	2.8	2.8
White	67.8	66.9	66.2	65.6	65.1	64.5	64.0	63.6	63.8
Two or More Races	1.3	1.4	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.7	2.0	1.9
All	99.8	99.8	99.8	99.8	99.8	99.8	99.8	99.8	99.8

Source: Source: Emsi occupation employment data are based on final Emsi industry data and final Emsi staffing patterns. Wage estimates are based on Occupational Employment Statistics (QCEW and Non-QCEW Employees classes of worker) and the American Community Survey (Self-Employed and Extended Proprietors). Occupational wage estimates are also affected by county-level Emsi earnings by industry.

Data shows that people of color in Cleveland are not seeing major gains in securing jobs that provide family-sustaining wages. While this data highlights disparities, it is important to dig deeper into the reasons behind them. Many workers of color are concentrated in service jobs or self-employment, which often offer lower wages and fewer benefits. As a result, these groups remain underrepresented in higher-paying industries.

Several factors contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in accessing well-paying jobs. Bias—both conscious and unconscious—plays a major role in hiring, promotions, and salary decisions. Educational requirements, the lack of generational wealth, and systemic racism in pre-employment practices make it harder for workers of color to advance. Additionally, limited trust in workplace environments and barriers like transportation and healthcare access further restrict economic mobility.

To reduce these disparities, the focus must be on fixing broken systems—not just individuals. Economic development efforts should prioritize workers' needs, ensuring that new businesses coming to Cleveland offer fair wages and equitable hiring practices. Diversity audits can help companies identify and eliminate discriminatory policies. Public education campaigns and employer training on implicit bias can further promote inclusivity. Additionally, offering incentives to companies that set and meet diversity goals can encourage long-term change.

Helping workers earn higher wages requires targeted programs that allow them to learn while they earn. Training opportunities with flexible schedules can help entry-level employees gain certifications and degrees to move into better-paying roles. Stronger partnerships with school districts can expose students to high-demand skills and careers early on, setting them up for future success.

Creating racial and economic equity in Cleveland's workforce requires a broad strategy that removes systemic barriers while supporting career advancement. By enacting policy changes, increasing diversity in hiring, and expanding skill-building programs, the city can create a stronger, more inclusive economy that benefits all residents.

Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

INVEST IN COMPANIES THAT INVEST IN PEOPLE: Support businesses that pay good wages to support families and hire and promote more people of color.

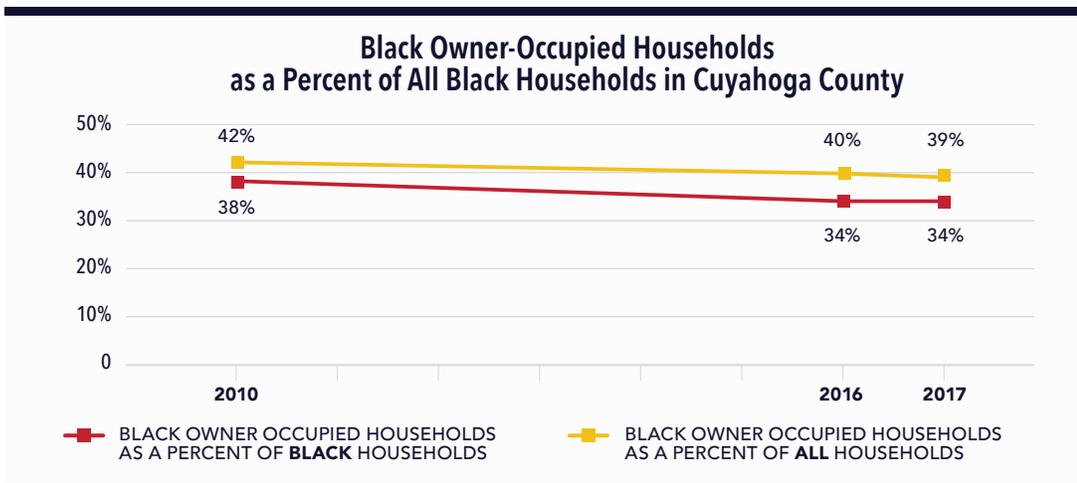
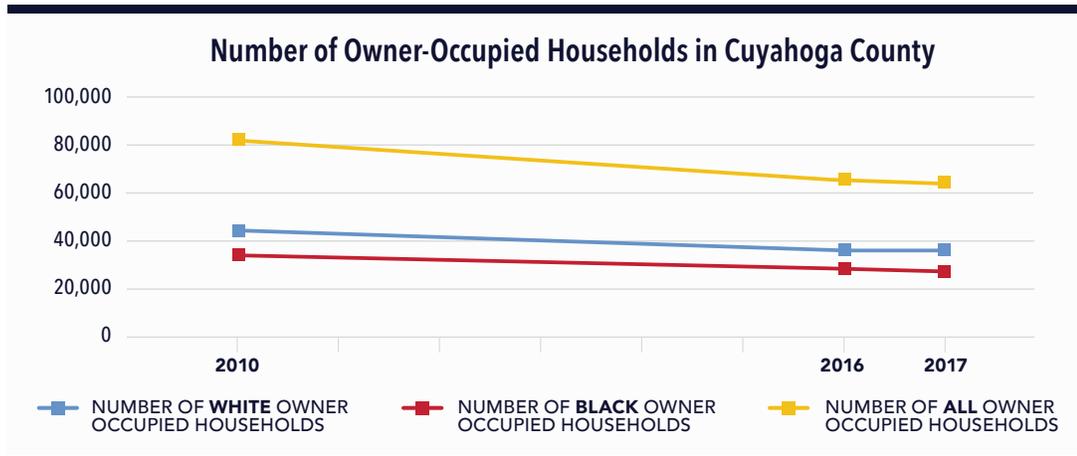
BOOST EMPLOYEE SUPPORT: Offers services to employees that add value beyond the paycheck.

EXPAND EARN-AND-LEARN PROGRAMS: Create flexible job training for healthcare and daycare workers to earn degrees while working.

STRENGTHEN CAREER READINESS PROGRAMS: Work with schools to teach students the skills needed for good jobs and financial success.

WEALTH CREATION

INDICATOR: Number of Owner-Occupied Households in Cuyahoga County



Data Source: US Census 2010, American Community Survey 2016 and 2017

Home purchase lending to Black borrowers in Cuyahoga County increased between 2016 and 2021, which is a positive step. However, deeper analysis reveals troubling trends. Overall homeownership rates are declining, and Black borrowers often receive higher interest rates than White borrowers for home loans. Additionally, investor purchases in majority-Black neighborhoods, particularly on Cleveland’s East Side, are on the rise. This raises concerns about the growing control of local housing by non-resident investors.

Another major challenge is the availability of homes priced under \$100,000. While these homes present opportunities for affordable homeownership, lending practices often make it difficult for buyers to secure financing. Without access to low-dollar mortgages, many potential homeowners are shut out, limiting wealth-building opportunities for Black communities in Cleveland.

Reducing homeownership disparities requires a comprehensive strategy that includes policy changes, community involvement, and financial education.

Several factors contribute to homeownership disparities in Cleveland. One major issue is the rise in investor-owned properties, especially in majority-Black neighborhoods like Cleveland’s East Side and the East Inner Suburbs. As investors buy more homes, fewer opportunities exist for local residents to become homeowners. Many of these investors live outside the area and often neglect property maintenance, prioritizing profits over community well-being. This shift weakens community stability by placing local real estate under the control of absentee landlords rather than residents.

Another key factor is the racial gap in credit scores. Black borrowers, on average, have lower credit scores than White borrowers, leading to higher mortgage interest rates. These financial barriers make it harder for Black residents to secure affordable home loans, further limiting access to homeownership and deepening economic inequality.

Homes priced under \$100,000 present both an opportunity and a challenge for homeownership. Many banks have strict lending policies and often refuse to approve mortgages for homes below \$50,000 or \$100,000, making it difficult for buyers, especially in lower-income communities—to secure financing. Additionally, home repair loans are hard to obtain, preventing homeowners from maintaining and improving property values.

Beyond financial barriers, cultural stigmas around discussing money and wealth within some African American communities can also discourage financial planning and homeownership. These factors—limited access to affordable mortgages, lack of home repair financing, property neglect by investors, and financial taboos—all contribute to ongoing homeownership disparities in Cleveland, particularly among Black and marginalized communities.

Reducing homeownership disparities in Cleveland requires a comprehensive strategy that includes policy changes, community involvement, and financial education. Stronger policies are needed to protect residents from harmful real estate practices, such as implementing rent control and holding banks accountable for fair lending. Closing loopholes that allow out-of-state investors to operate as slumlords is also crucial, along with strengthening enforcement of housing regulations.

Increasing transparency in property ownership, especially for multi-level LLCs, would help city officials hold absentee landlords accountable and ensure responsible property management. Expanding partnerships with financial education organizations can empower residents with knowledge about wealth-building and credit improvement, particularly in marginalized communities.

Additionally, encouraging collective homeownership efforts—where families pool resources to buy homes—could help more people enter the housing market. Engaging real estate professionals and city officials in conversations about equitable lending and property ownership transparency will also help drive long-term change.

To address the higher interest rates faced by Black borrowers, ongoing research is needed to track lending trends and make data on loan approvals and interest rates by race publicly available. Establishing a loan-loss reserve fund for home repair loans in majority-Black communities can help reduce perceived lending risks, making it easier for homeowners to maintain their properties and preserve home values.

City officials need stronger tools to hold outside developers and investors accountable for code violations, ensuring responsible property management. Expanding credit repair programs and culturally competent financial education can also empower residents to improve their financial standing and access better loan opportunities.

Collaboration with lending institutions is crucial to addressing racial disparities in mortgage lending and ensuring equitable access to home loans. By working together, policymakers, financial institutions, and community organizations can build a more inclusive and fair housing market in Cleveland.

Pillar strategists recommended strategies based on their potential impact, practicality, clarity, and fairness to create clear paths for change.

RECOMMENDED STRATEGIES:

FIX DISCRIMINATORY HOUSING POLICIES: Close loopholes that let outside investors exploit renters and enforce fair housing rules.

USE CITY FUNDS FOR CHANGE: Push banks to offer more home loans by leveraging city deposits.

Support Home Repairs: Create a loan fund to help homeowners in Black and Brown communities access needed repairs.

IMPROVE CREDIT ACCESS: Offer training to help people build credit and get better loan rates.

EXPAND OUTREACH: Partner with groups that teach wealth-building and financial education.

WORK WITH BANKS: Share data with lenders and push for fairer loan policies for people of color.

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