



Dear LA Community,



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I want to say a few words about events since the Memorial Day murder of George Floyd by police officers in Minneapolis. The events in Minneapolis and response to those events are overwhelming and I think it's important to comment on the connection between these two concerns, the death of a Black man at the hands of police, and the experience of COVID-19 in Los Angeles County.

First, I want to express my personal heartbreak and anger, and that of my colleagues at the department of public health, over this most recent death of a Black American at the hands of police officers. There are no words for the horror that the picture we've all seen from Minneapolis brings up. I want to extend my deepest sympathy to the Floyd family and to Mr. Floyd's friends and his community. I also want to extend my condolences to the families and friends of Breonna Taylor and Tony McDade, and the many other families that have borne witness to violence against their loved ones.

And I want to thank everyone who came together peacefully to stand against racism and violence.

I also would like to take a minute to try to connect this brutal event to what we see in Los Angeles County in dealing with COVID-19. We know that Black Americans fare worse than other groups on virtually every measure of health status. And it has become all too common to blame this on individual behaviors when in fact the science is clear: the root cause of health inequities is racism and discrimination and how it limits access to the very opportunities and resources each of us need for optimal health and well-being. Science also tells us that that lifetime stress associated with experiences of daily acts of discrimination and oppression play a major role. It starts at birth, with higher rates of Black infant mortality and shockingly higher rates of maternal mortality among Black women, and extends through adulthood, when we see Black residents of LA County experiencing earlier onset of heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes and early deaths. When I report each week that we have seen elevated numbers of black deaths in this county due to COVID-19, I am reporting on the consequences of these long-standing inequities.

And it is not just the direct victim of violence – the man or woman who is beaten or shot or asphyxiated – who pays the price for police brutality. It is an entire community that lives with the fear that the next time it could be them, or their son or daughter, neighbor or friend. It is the consequence of that fear that we are seeing when we report instance after instance of inequality in health outcomes. Kareem Abdul-Jabbar put it eloquently in an op-ed in the LA Times when he said the black community has to ask itself if "being black means sheltering at home for the rest of their lives because the racism virus infecting the country is more deadly than COVID-19."

The op-ed piece called for a rush to justice as the answer to events like this. As the department responsible for public health in LA County, and in acknowledgement that addressing law enforcement violence and racism are core to public health, this rush to justice has to be part of our prescription as well.

Barbara *Barbara Ferrer*

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