June 3, 2020

Statement on Racism as a Public Health Crisis

Our organizations are in solidarity in affirming that racism is a public health issue and that the recent displays of racist police violence further illuminate that the United States is entrenched in this crisis. As the Equitable Maternal Health Coalition, we seek to improve maternal health outcomes by ensuring access to safe, affordable and intentionally equitable perinatal care.

The organizations represented by the Coalition have responded to the maternal mortality crisis in the United States in a variety of ways, including by implementing clinical quality and safety programs, implicit bias training, and prenatal and postpartum education on warning signs. Coalition members champion change at the state and local level and provide safety nets for parents and families, such as doulas, community-based organizations and advocates providing solace and dignity in pregnancy and parenting. Collectively and separately, our organizations advocate for policy change to dismantle the underpinnings of systemic racism that lead to the structural and social determinants that drive inequities in health.

We applaud each and every effort to create safe touchpoints for people while they are pregnant, giving birth, recovering in the postpartum year and parenting. However, the allostatic load borne by Black women in the United States after enduring intergenerational, chronic stress is exacerbated on a regular basis by the unequal and deadly policing of Black people. This personal, familial and communal battle for survival directly affects mental and physical health. These health conditions and comorbidities, which present in many cases of maternal and infant mortality and morbidity, have a root cause that is independent of income, education, behaviors and other social determinants of health—racism.

The vicarious trauma and weathering that Black people experience as normal is abhorrent and tragic. We join in solidarity to dismantle societal racism and to use our voices to champion a new era in United States history. The health and lives of the populations for whom we advocate depend on it.