As members and leaders from many of Chicago’s healthcare organizations addressing the disproportionate black and brown mortality from the COVID-19 pandemic, we say without hesitation that Black Lives Matter.

No person of decency can look at the images of George Floyd’s killing without feelings of rage, horror, shame and grief. The deaths of Mr. Floyd, Rayshard Brooks, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor — and too many others — are unjust and unconscionable.

We must double down on our efforts. Systemic racism is a real threat to the health of our patients, families and communities. We stand with all of those who have raised their voices to capture the attention of Chicago and the nation with a clear call for action.

The health centers and hospitals we represent are deeply woven into the fabric of the communities we serve, live and work in, and we stand united as frontline staff against racism, injustice and inequality.

Racism results in generational trauma and poverty, while also unquestionably causing higher rates of chronic illness and death in black and brown communities. We have seen — in its rawest form — how the trauma of systemic racism adds to the historical injustices that have disproportionately affected communities of color. Community health centers and Chicago hospitals work to provide high-quality, compassionate care in the face of health disparities and the outcomes resulting from social and economic inequities.

These social determinants of health include poverty, under-housing, underperforming schools, police brutality, mass incarceration, food deserts, joblessness, poor access to healthcare and violence. All of these factors contribute to health inequities in our communities. And they serve as a recipe for pain, suffering, premature mortality — and understandable civil unrest.

In our communities, there is also resilience, innovation, a tradition of faith and a spirit of unity that manages to thrive even under the weight of this systemic burden. Imagine the unity that manages to thrive even under the weight of the pandemic, as agents of change.

Our society only truly thrives when everyone has access to vital medications and food. We stand united as frontline staff against racism, injustice and inequality.

Racism is a real threat to the health of our patients, families and communities. We must double down on our efforts. Systemic racism results in generational trauma and poverty. It is undeniable: Racism is a public health crisis.

As healthcare organizations, we will help serve our communities by:

- Re-examine our institutional policies with an equity lens and make any policy changes that promote equity and opportunity.
- Improve access to primary and specialty care.
- Continue to focus on helping our communities overcome chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease and asthma.
- Continue to advocate for investments that create innovative solutions to achieve enduring improvements in access, quality and health outcomes for our communities.
- Continue our commitment to hiring locally and promoting leaders of color.
- Renew and expand our organizations’ commitment to providing anti-racism and implicit bias training for our physicians, nurses and staff.
- Advocate for increased funding for social needs, social services and programs that promote social justice.

Our society only truly thrives when everyone has an opportunity to succeed and lead a healthy life. We are committed to moving forward together. By harnessing the collective strengths of our organizations, we will help serve our communities as agents of change.

Sincerely,

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