New Jersey can be a healthier, more equitable state when everyone feels free to use their voice and influence policies affecting their wellbeing. People most directly affected by systemic barriers and inequities are best positioned to identify the solutions and actions needed to drive change. Many people have been kept from such involvement through generations of systemic exclusion and disinvestment. New Jersey leaders across sectors — business, government, healthcare, and others — can maximize the impact of public investments by developing community-informed, diverse, and targeted implementation strategies with effective enforcement and accountability mechanisms.

Research shows that achieving equitable outcomes requires more than robust investments. It requires a focus on equity at every step to build and share power with communities. Community power is achieved when people come together to take actions that drive structural change and hold decisionmakers accountable.

**A Policy Agenda for a Healthier, More Equitable New Jersey** offers policy recommendations to support equity-informed decisions and power-building across New Jersey.

### Policy recommendations

1. **Establish a state task force to assess historic harm to New Jerseyans who are Black and propose remedial steps**
   - The task force should include a diverse group, including community leaders and affected residents. To promote meaningful engagement, the task force should have authority to make recommendations to the legislature, governor, and departmental agencies.
   - Cities and the state should consider adopting resolutions supporting a federal reparations study commission.

2. **Create and fund an interagency equity working group to provide leadership on cross-sector collaboration**
   - New Jersey should join other states that have adopted cross-agency collaborative efforts to promote equity.
   - As the Governor’s office updates New Jersey’s 2020 State Health Improvement Plan, a cornerstone should be the state’s “Health in All Policies” agenda — a strategy that strengthens the link between health and policies such as education, housing, and transportation to support health and wellbeing.
In alignment with recommendations from the American Public Health Association, the Governor’s office should establish and lead an inter-agency workgroup to develop, govern, and create collaborative opportunities to help all New Jerseyans achieve their best health. New Jersey officials should coordinate with state systems outside of health, human services, and child and family sectors to include the state Departments of Education, Transportation, Community Affairs, Labor and Workforce Development, and Corrections.

The state should provide sustainable funding for operations and pilot projects and develop performance metrics and accountability mechanisms, including a community-driven, jurisdiction-wide racial equity and social justice action plan to monitor progress toward goals.

3. **Assess the impact of significant new legislation and regulations on racial equity within New Jersey**

- New Jersey should expand its existing racial impact statement process by, for example, broadening the requirement for racial impact assessments for legislative and regulatory proposals to cover such areas as housing and health policy development and implementation.
- New Jersey was one of the first states to implement a requirement for racial and ethnic impact statements for specific proposed criminal justice legislation. It is the only state to require state agencies to prepare racial and ethnic impact statements for proposed rule-making. As of 2022, there has only been one such statement in New Jersey.
- Legislators should consider looking back at past effects of existing legislation in certain areas on various populations.
- Staff developing racial impact assessments must have adequate resources, including time, staffing, and technical support; assessments should be transparent and available to all interested parties — including constituents — early in the legislative process.
- Municipal officials should examine the use of racial impact assessments such as those used by the cities of Seattle and New York, and Montgomery County, Maryland in land use and zoning decisions.

4. **Acknowledge the presence and effects of structural racism and plan action**

- To promote conversation, New Jersey could issue gubernatorial executive orders, legislative and local government resolutions, and declarations of racism as a threat to public health. A growing number of state and city leaders in the U.S. have done so by declaring racism a public health crisis.

We hold ourselves accountable to inspiring New Jerseyans to take an active role in shaping policies affecting their health and wellbeing. Together, we can achieve a reality in which policies and practices welcome and include diverse perspectives.

For more information on this issue and others affecting health and wellbeing in the Garden State, please visit [www.rwjf.org/nj](http://www.rwjf.org/nj)

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**About the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation**

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) is committed to improving health and health equity in the United States. In partnership with others, we are working to develop a Culture of Health rooted in equity that provides every individual with a fair and just opportunity to thrive, no matter who they are, where they live, or how much money they have. For more information, visit [www.rwjf.org](http://www.rwjf.org).