

June 15, 2020

**Statement From  
A.J. Wilhelmi, President & CEO, and Phillip M. Kambic\*, Board of Trustees Chair  
Illinois Health and Hospital Association**

**Addressing Health Disparities**

The senseless and tragic killing of George Floyd in Minneapolis has sparked outrage, grief and frustration among people from all backgrounds, and exposed once again the systemic racism, injustice, and inequality that unfortunately still exist within the fabric of our society. Simultaneously, the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on people and communities of color has highlighted the fact that dramatic health disparities continue to exist in Illinois. The combination of these two events has heightened everyone's awareness to these issues and has set the stage for the possibility of true change.

No one has all the answers to eliminate systemic racism, injustice, inequality, violence, and health and socio-economic disparities. But the Illinois Health and Hospital Association (IHA) and its more than 200 hospital and nearly 40 health system members across the state recognize that more can and must be done. We are even more strongly committed to working with our communities, our government partners and all stakeholders to advance and achieve tangible and lasting change to address these societal ills.

If we are to achieve IHA's vision for Illinois healthcare – that all individuals and communities have access to high-quality healthcare at the right time, in the right setting, in order to support each person's quest for optimum health – then redoubling our efforts to address health disparities is imperative.

IHA and the hospital community have been engaged in this important work for years. Illinois hospitals have undertaken numerous activities, both individually and collectively, to address health disparities and the social determinants of health. For example, several IHA member hospitals in Chicago are engaged and committed participants in the [Chicago Hospital Engagement, Action and Leadership \(HEAL\) Initiative](#) – a bold, three-year plan to improve health and reduce violence through neighborhood engagement by identifying ways to address social determinants of health impacting vulnerable communities. Similarly, in 2018, the IHA Board of Trustees created a Supplier Diversity Task Force charged with identifying and overcoming barriers for minority contractors and suppliers to improve access to work on hospital capital construction projects. Many hospitals throughout the state are actively engaged [in other initiatives](#) to address factors that influence good health, including community programs and affordable housing.

To further enhance our voice and our efforts on these important issues, the IHA Board is establishing a permanent standing committee on health disparities. This committee will develop and implement strategies to address health disparities and the underlying socio-economic factors that continue to adversely affect vulnerable communities and populations across Illinois – especially black and brown communities.

As a hospital community committed to healing and providing care to all of our patients, it is especially incumbent upon us to work together for real change to achieve racial justice, equality and inclusion, and to end health disparities that have been so starkly exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the George Floyd injustice. We believe we are in the midst of a long overdue, historic and profound turning point, and we stand ready to work with our communities, government partners and other stakeholders to address these critical societal challenges.

[\*Phillip M. Kambic is President & CEO of Riverside Healthcare in Kankakee.]

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#### **About IHA**

The Illinois Health and Hospital Association, with offices in Chicago, Naperville, Springfield and Washington, D.C., advocates for Illinois' more than 200 hospitals and nearly 40 health systems as they serve their patients and communities. IHA members provide a broad range of services, not just within their walls, but across the continuum of healthcare and in their communities. Reflecting the diversity of the state, IHA members consist of nonprofit, investor-owned and public hospitals in the following categories: community, safety net, rural, critical access, specialty and teaching hospitals, including academic medical centers. For more information, see [www.team-iha.org](http://www.team-iha.org). Like IHA on [Facebook](#). Follow IHA on [Twitter](#).