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Juneteenth

June 19th, known as Juneteenth, is a historic day in the United States commemorating the day in 1865 that federal troops arrived in Texas to ensure all remaining enslaved people were freed. Although the Emancipation Proclamation came two and half years prior on January 1st, 1863, it wasn't until June 19th, 1865 that many slaves knew they were free. Juneteenth celebrates the end of slavery and is a symbolic date for the freedom of African Americans.

Juneteenth serves as a reminder that the fight for racial justice continues. Racial inequity and structural racism take a toll on the mental and physical health of Black, Brown, and other marginalized populations. We are committed to combating structural and interpersonal racism as the source of this stress and offering mental health support and assistance at our health department. Our agency is actively working towards racial justice, and to better understand what we can do we plan to conduct an agency equity assessment. With the results we will:

- Review all internal policies and make necessary revisions to ensure systemic equity.
- Create a diversity and inclusion committee to promote regular dialogue surrounding racism, diversity, and social justice.
- Implement agency-wide staff trainings and dedicate time for exploration of bias.

“Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, public health has been receiving more acknowledgment for our role and our work with communities to address and resolve public concerns,” shared Lisa Peacock, Health Officer. “Racism and discrimination influence mental and physical health, and they are barriers to health equity. Racism and discrimination are public health issues that we must actively work to remove from our society through conversation and policy change.”

Our Mission and agency Fundamentals are focused on driving our work toward our Vision—Healthy People in Healthy Communities. One of our agency fundamentals is acting with integrity. We do not condone bigotry, misogyny, racism, or hatred in our language, daily activities, or culture at the health department. We condemn and actively fight against white supremacy, racial bias, and racial inequities in all forms. It is in our commitment to understanding the root causes of health that will help us analyze data and formulate strategies to develop healthy, resilient, and thriving communities.

The Health Department of Northwest Michigan is mandated by the Michigan Public Health Code to promote wellness, prevent disease, provide quality healthcare, address health problems of vulnerable populations, and protect the environment for the residents and visitors of Antrim, Charlevoix, Emmet, and Otsego counties. For more information, visit nwhealth.org.

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