Reduction in Health and Well-being by Addressing Structural Racism in the U.S.

This inaugural policy academy will be part of an on-going series addressing the role policy plays in population health. This format is intentionally designed to culminate into a cross-sector focus group where participants’ input will guide and inform future policy academies. This academy will:

- Use arts, culture and other modalities to raise awareness and offer solutions about how policy and resource allocation often create or perpetuate health inequities and racial injustice;
- Explore the evidence linking structural racism with poor health, highlight the role of arts and culture in healing and promoting equity and social change; and,
- Foster a dialogue to advance policies and practices across a variety of sectors aimed at eliminating racism and promoting health and well-being equity in our state.

Ultimately, we hope the on-going series will help develop an action agenda for policy, practice and research to guide our collective efforts at the state and community level, and among researchers in Delaware.
The Partnerships for Healthy Communities (PHC) recognizes that a healthy community goes beyond quality medical care and is reflected in the social and environmental factors that promote well-being, inclusive of arts and culture. It is a place where all are free from discrimination and oppression and there is equitable access to the resources needed for optimal health. A large and growing body of evidence supports the notion that social and environmental factors are the greatest determinants of health and that inequities in these determinants drive health disparities. Further, social conditions such as poverty, segregation, a lack of educational and employment opportunities, and experiences with the criminal justice system are rooted in discriminatory policies and practices at the individual, community and institutional levels.

The Partnership for Arts and Culture (PAC) recognizes that arts and culture are paramount to the health of a community. PAC promotes the engagement of the arts and humanities in designing, implementing and assessing multidisciplinary solutions to areas of critical social concern and needs, including structural racism, health equity and equitable access to the arts. A few areas impacted by arts and cultural projects include healing, attitudinal change, increased civic participation, cognitive, behavioral and effective engagement, enhanced empathy, and policy change.

Experts define structural racism as “the totality of ways in which societies foster racial discrimination through mutually reinforcing systems of housing, education, employment, earnings, benefits, credit, media, healthcare and criminal justice. These patterns and practices in turn reinforce discriminatory beliefs, values, and distribution of resources.” Despite a growing understanding that structural racism plays a significant role in the poor health of oppressed groups, policy makers, scholars, practitioners and other key stakeholders are reluctant to identify racism as a root cause of health inequities. A more concerted effort to recognize and address structural racism is critical to improve the health of communities and advance health equity in our state.

While health inequities affect many different communities and groups defined by characteristics such as income or education level, gender identity and sexual orientation, or disability status, our focus for this event is on racial health inequities due to their large and pervasive nature. Further, while we recognize the importance of health inequities that exist across various racial and ethnic groups, including Native Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans, we believe that the historical context of slavery and persistent oppression among Black Americans in the United States warrants particular focus.