# VOICES FROM THE FRONTLINES:
# A Chorus of COVID

## COMMUNITY COLLABORATIVE THOUGHT PARTNER PROJECT

### POLICY, INSTITUTIONAL & COMMUNITY

### INSIGHT REPORT

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# This project captures equity insights from Washington community-based pandemic first responders.

# Contents

"We humans walk around thinking that we are the top of the evolution pyramid.

Look how easily a single-celled virus can take us down."

—Priya Jayadev
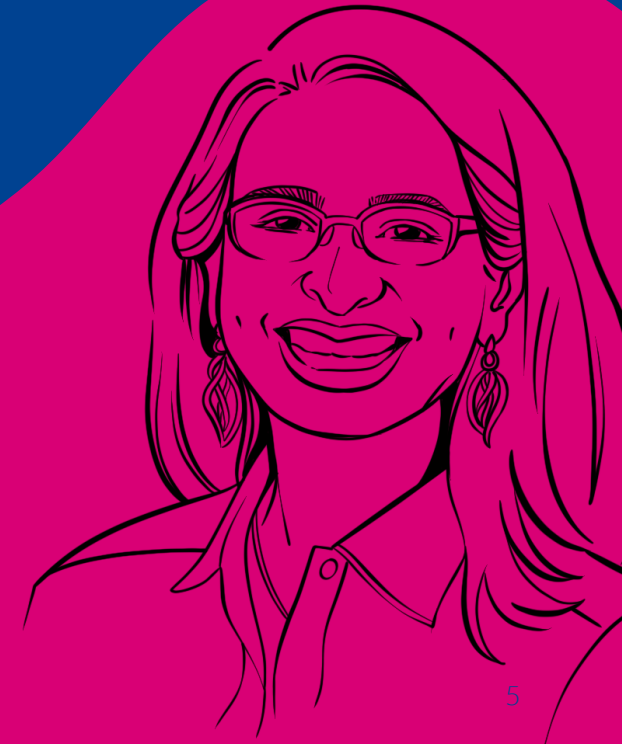
# If we listen, COVID gave us crucial lessons about valuing human life

Poor health is often how communities that dominant society marginalizes **know** and **feel** what exclusion really is. COVID showed several intersecting crises in public health — from the home front to the workforce and practically everywhere else you could imagine.

The ongoing pandemic is also deeply entangled with the ways we don't treat people well. It vividly illustrates pre-existing inequities — racial injustice, ableism, high incarceration, poor eldercare, the school to prison pipeline, lack of worker protection, no to low wage employment, housing and food insecurity, the pains of social isolation, lack of resources for those struggling with addiction, people without healthcare, life with no internet, cut-off utilities, no car or slow transit, strain carried by all caregivers.

The list above could go on.

These are just some of the dangerous intersections where COVID forced communities and advocates to speak up and pushback.

This is why it's urgent that politicians, institutions, employers, and sometimes everyday people not forget what COVID ruthlessly taught us all over three heartbreaking years.

## Let's remember the life lessons COVID taught us for post-pandemic life and future crises

# POLICY INSIGHT

*Community first responders from Washington share their wisdom for empowering policy work, as COVID's after-effects continue.*

**POLICY INSIGHT**

- **Community Engagement**
- **Collaboration**
- **Data Equity**
- **Policy Change**
- **Youth**

# Community Engagement

### Center people facing barriers

Center people facing any barriers to health including those who are incarcerated, housing and food insecure, undocumented, dealing with substance abuse and behavioral health issues, caregivers, low/no income.

### Make inclusive community engagement guides

Make community engagement guides readily available that include people with dark to fair skin tones, all body types, ages, gender expressions, hair textures, facial features, economic backgrounds.

### Center Black, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latinx, & BIPOC faces

Make Black, Indigenous, Pacific Islander, Hispanic/Latinx, BIPOC faces visible and centered as a visual norm. We want to see ourselves visually represented across this work.
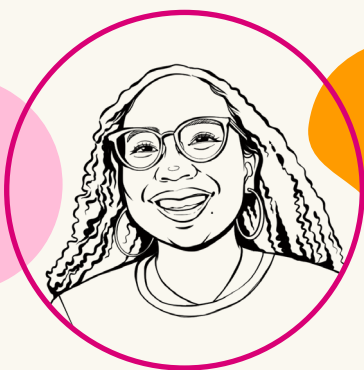
"It's rather unfortunate that it took COVID for us to be able to have any form of funding or support

to do the things that we wanted to do for ages for our community...

to be able to open this safe space where we can provide services to the kids, to the seniors."

—Pa Ousman Joof

# Community Engagement
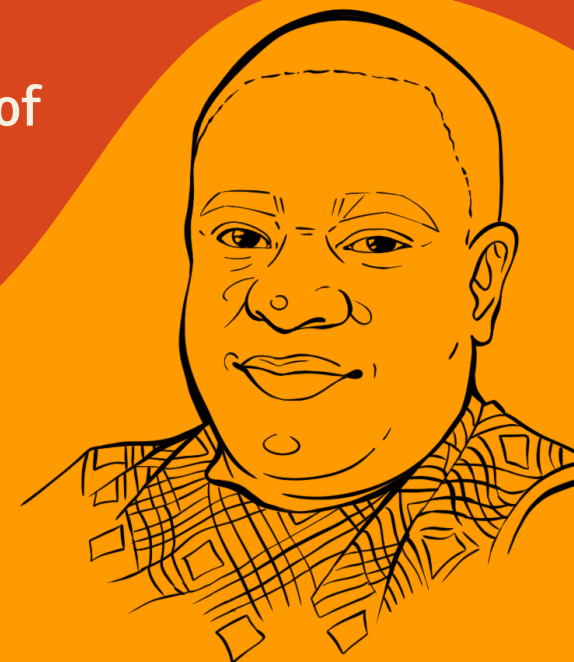
## Document collective lessons

Document collective lessons to create accountability to our communities at all intersections in public health with clear language and clear goals.

## Make community-centered decisions

Commit to inclusive community-centered decision making that factors in histories of exclusion — past and present.

## Work with community leaders

Work with community leaders. Tap into different community members based on what they care about.

- community organizers
- mutual aid workers
- cultural workers
- artists, educators, teaching artists
- sports groups
- library workers
- ethnic media
- media makers
- school/ afterschool groups
- family reunion planners

# Collaboration

## Require collective effort

Focus on approaches that require collective effort that can't be done as individuals or separate organizations.

## Value inclusive civic collaborations

Value and create inclusive civic collaborations that start with communities leading and having decision-making power and influence.

## Allow community members & staff to engage

Be flexible, nimble, strategic, responsive. But slow down for community members and your staff so they can process and fully engage and provide their best expertise.

## Resource lists of community-led spaces

Create resource lists of community-led spaces across the state to aid partnerships.

# Collaboration

## Design trainings by & for communities experiencing inequities

Design trainings by and for communities that experience inequities such as mass incarceration, housing and food insecurity, substance use, mental illness, racism, ableism, ageism, xenophobia, sexism, transphobia and other forms of exclusion.

Make their gifts and aspirations the focus.

## Build civic leadership skills within communities

Build civic leadership skills within communities so that these leadership opportunities are available broadly and relevant for underrepresented communities.

## Share big institutional budget resources

Share big institutional budget resources in generous, bold, and accountable ways.

# Data Equity

## Public health disparity information

Make information on public health disparities easily found, searchable, and in plain language.

## Communities define investment

Create opportunities for communities to proactively define what investment looks/feels like.

## Data analysis training

Invest in training underrepresented communities in data analysis so communities can make informed interpretations without gatekeepers.

## Human-centered frameworks

Make human-centered frameworks that avoid pathologizing communities that experience disparities due to social exclusion and oppression and ask for better civic and communty investment.

## Equitable data collection methods

Commit to equitable data collection methods (e.g. language access, involving community-based trusted messengers).

## Available public dollars

Make public dollars available for community-led data collection and continue vital partnerships with most affected communities.

# Policy Change

## Use the momentum of COVID

Use the impetus of COVID for broadscale policy change in health care access.

## Keep communities involved

Every policymaking space should have policy, protocol, and behaviors that keep communities involved and able to shape policy outcomes.

## Hire diverse staff with lived experiences

Hire staff with diverse lived experiences who can support work/policy outcomes that are rooted in experience.

## Remember equitable decision-making

Remember that equitable decision-making is why we improved the rates of vaccination in communities of color. Don't forget sometimes white people disengaged on safety when they learned people of color needed help.

# Youth

## Invest in youth

Use COVID as an opportunity to invest in youth and particularly youth of color, incarcerated youth, unhoused youth, food insecure youth, but do so by celebrating their gifts. Don't stigmatize or typify them when society fails them.

## Connect with youth

Connect with youth through schools, afterschool programs, BIPOC-led cultural group as a way to do community engagement dynamically.

## Pursue public health careers

Ensure that young people and their families are able to pursue public health careers.

schools

afterschool programs

BIPOC-led cultural group

YOUTH

CELEBRATE THEIR GIFTS
+
CONNECT TO CAREERS
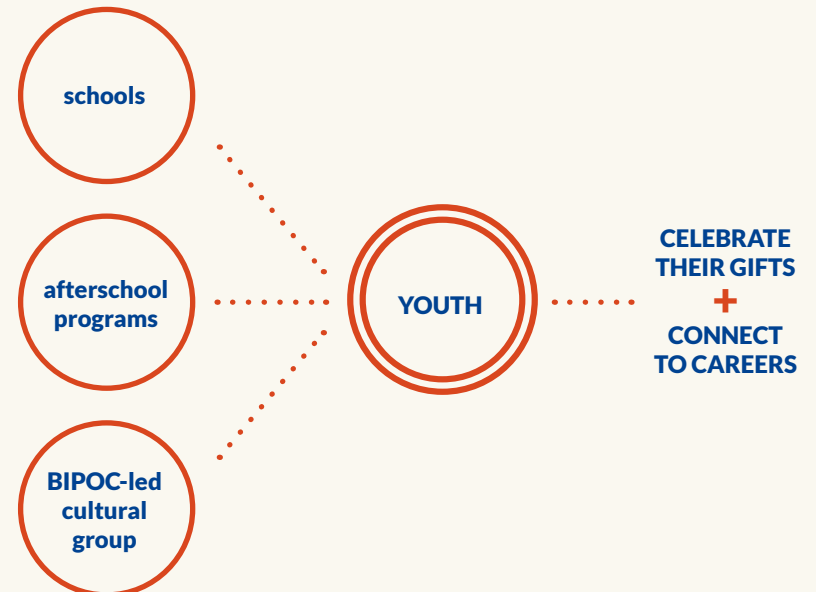
"Myth has it that COVID
gets extra lives

(mutations) by devouring
our loved ones.

But it mostly feasts
on the victims of
misinformation."

—Jordan Chaney

# Racial Disparity & COVID-19 Data

## NH/PI+AI/AN

**HIGHEST AGE ADJUSTED COVID-19 CASE RATES**

Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (NH/PI) and American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) populations had the **highest age adjusted COVID-19 case rates**

# Racial Disparity & COVID-19 Data

**2.5x**
HIGHER
AGE-ADJUSTED
DEATH RATES

American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) populations have **2.5x higher age-adjusted death rates** than Asian and White populations.

# Racial Disparity & COVID-19 Data

COVID-19 DEATH RATES NEARLY **2x** HIGHER
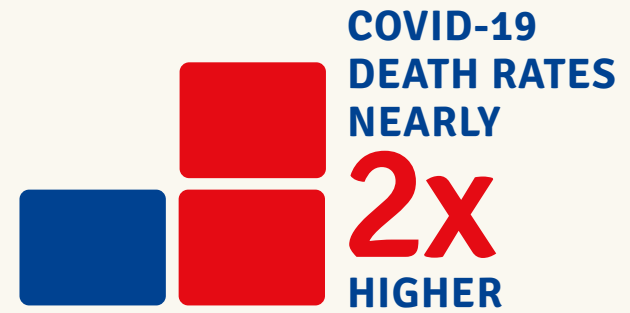
Black/African American populations have **COVID-19 death rates nearly 2x higher** than Asian, White, and Multiracial populations.

# COVID-19 Hospitalizations Data



**HIGHEST HOSPITALIZATION RATES**

**Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders populations** had the **highest hospitalization rates** among confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases.

# COVID-19 Hospitalizations Data



**NH/PI RATES OF HOSPITALIZATION 5x HIGHER**

**Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander populations** had **rates of hospitalization 5x higher** than White populations among confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases.

# INSTITUTIONAL INSIGHT

*What do community first responders want health institutions to remember about COVID?*

## INSTITUTIONAL INSIGHT

- Inclusivity
- Language Accessibility
- Creativity
- Digital Equity
- Disparity
- Education
- Environment
- Funding
- Hope
- Scale

# Inclusivity

### Discourage community divisions

Don't foster divisions in our community; it collectively costs us human lives.

### Understand respective needs

Imagine marginalized communities in concrete ways and know how our respective needs may be different from dominant culture.

### Invest in behavioral health

Know there needs to be significant investment in behavioral health at all intersections of society.

### Invest in communities experiencing disparity

Invest in communities that experience disparity broadly and COVID-related disparity particularly.

### Plan for regular resourcing

Plan for the regular resourcing of communities at the intersections of disability justice (BIPOC, LGBTIAA+, unhoused, incarcerated, elderly, low/no income, dealing with mental health and substance use issues).

### Make a scale & structure

Make a scale and structure that holds the above.

# Language Accessibility

### Provide multi-language tools

Make multi-language tools available from the start, not just English or English & Spanish only, design multi-language access, use ASL interpreters.

### Remember our social worlds

Remember our social worlds in our local communities hold many different people.

### Think globally

Think globally. Not everyone in the United States or Washington state understands English.

### Share costs

Share costs with community groups. These resources are expensive.

### Make translations available

Make this report available in other languages.

# Creativity

## Spread public health messages

Get creative. Use arts & humanities to help spread public health messages (e.g. story, song, skits, flash mobs, dancing, games, pictures, podcasts, online content).

## Connect with artists

Connect with artists; they are magnetic.

## Find artists with intersectional lived experiences

Find artists whose lived experience is intersectional such as BIPOC artists, trans/queer artists of color, women of color of all gender expressions, incarcerated youth and adult artists.

## Use the humanities

Use the humanities to tap into the universal and specifics parts of the human story.

## Use the arts & culture

Use arts and culture to bring public health to life.
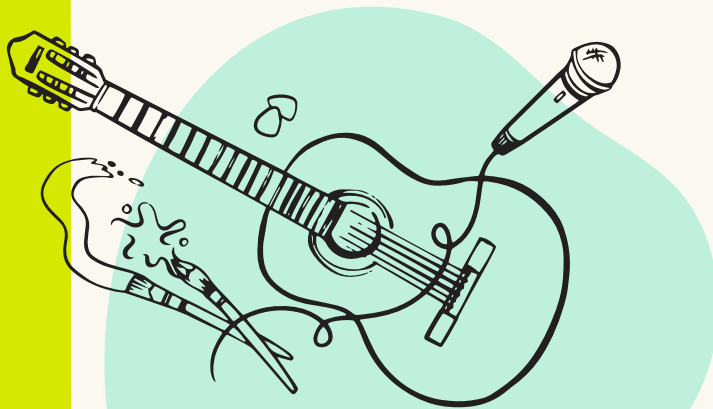
# Digital Equity

## Create information sharing systems

Create information sharing systems that anticipate how everyone can use digital content even with barriers (e.g. bring hot spots, make info easy to use on a cellphone, make an analog version with people sharing out verbally, and print on paper).

## Reach through high- & low-tech

Use high- and low-tech ways to reach people on air, online, in person.

# Disparity

## Address racial & economic disparities

Share how you are addressing racial and economic disparities in your work plans.

## Protect the vulnerable

Remember how many people lost their lives to COVID. Make future policies to protect the vulnerable across the board.

# Education

## Design educational projects

Design community science education projects.

## Know trends to understand gaps

Know trends in secondary (K-12) and postsecondary education (college) to understand communities with gaps in science education.

## Provide access

We need access to healing arts, grief support, wellness to thrive and more so when we are actively struggling.

# Environment

## Design outdoor spaces

Design outdoor spaces so people in our communities can get together safely.

## Help people understand HVAC systems

Help people understand how HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning) systems can filter air and underwrite this resource in marginalized communities.

# Funding

## Repeat rapid response

Repeat the rapid response approach to funding.

## Lower barriers

Keep lowering the barriers to accessing funds.

## Document needs

Keep documenting what was actually helpful in meeting the needs of local communities across the state.

## Share a community investment dashboard

Share a community investment dashboard.

## Help build infrastructure

Help communities build infrastructure for large cash inflows.

## Help design for scale

Help marginalized community leaders design for scale, they'll need to think in millions of dollars.

# Hope

## Need purpose & hope

Understand people need to have purpose and something to be hopeful for, to respond in a crisis full of grief.

## Need drive & connection

Remember people need drive. We need to feel a sense of meaning or purpose. We don't want to feel like a grain of sand on a beach. That doesn't help. We need connection. It lets us know we are not alone. Not as individuals or individual communities.

## Need belief & lifting up

Remember rapid responders need belief, meaning, and purpose in our service. We need policy makers to celebrate and uplift us, so we know our efforts matter.

"The shift to more virtual events such as conferences and job fairs helped me cope during the lockdown and find a community of like-minded individuals to network with."

**—Mulki Mohamed**

# Scale

## Provide nervous system support

Understand community public health leaders need nervous system support on individual and institutional levels. Think systems and psyches.

## Create wellbeing programs

Create wellbeing programs to support wellness for the community frontlines.

## Understand how trauma works

Understand how primary and secondary trauma work.

## Make support more inclusive

Find ways to make support more inclusive so it mirrors the lived experiences of working class people at all intersections of identity.

"I felt like the flowers were my medicine. The sun slanting a certain way was medicine.
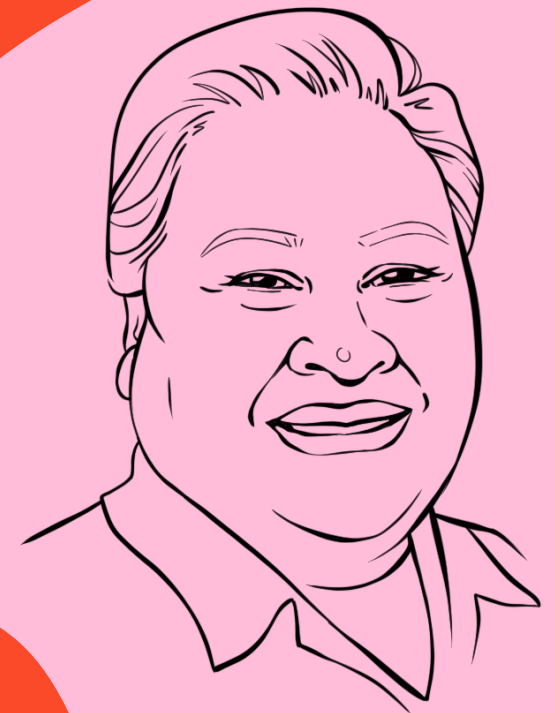
Little things to hold on to when things were scary and sad and so, so wrong."

—Zyna Bakari

"Be more respectful. Even to the ones who are not listening"

—Aunty Lua Pritchard

# COMMUNITY INSIGHT

*What did COVID "trusted messengers" want their own communities to remember about the pandemic?*

## COMMUNITY INSIGHT

- **Advocacy**
- **Awareness**
- **Connection**
- **Cross-Cultural**
- **Intergenerational Communication**
- **Isolation**
- **Purpose**

# Advocacy

### Organize & build

Organize together and build coalitions.

### Meet with legislative staff

Set up meetings with legislative staff who aid policymakers focused on health and health equity. These experts help set priorities for the policymakers they work for.

### Share this report

Share the info in this report as individual groups or a joint coalition to help move a collective vision forward.

### Develop a position paper

Develop a position paper, with actionable steps, and organizational signatures.

### Reach out to WA DOH Secretary of Health

Reach out to the Washington Department of Health Secretary of Health about COVID equity with community insight.

# Awareness

### Value your health

Remember your health is valuable.

### Right to ask

You have a right to ask the public health sector to help you to take care of your body, along with people in our communities.

### Campaigns should reflect you

You matter. Community public health education campaigns should reflect your life.

### Access to easy-to-understand information

You deserve access to easy-to-understand public health information and facts to stay healthy and thrive during medical crises.

### Address misinformation

Talk to loved ones and coworkers when they spread misinformation by word of mouth and on community channels.

# Connection

## Being social means being well

Know that being social is an important part of being well for many people.

## Gathering means support

Gathering is so meaningful across communities or often mandatory due to work and school life. We need support to explain how to celebrate, mourn, or live day to day life while still staying healthy.

## Stay healthy together

Work together to list out how we can stay healthy together especially if these changes are different from ways we're familiar with.
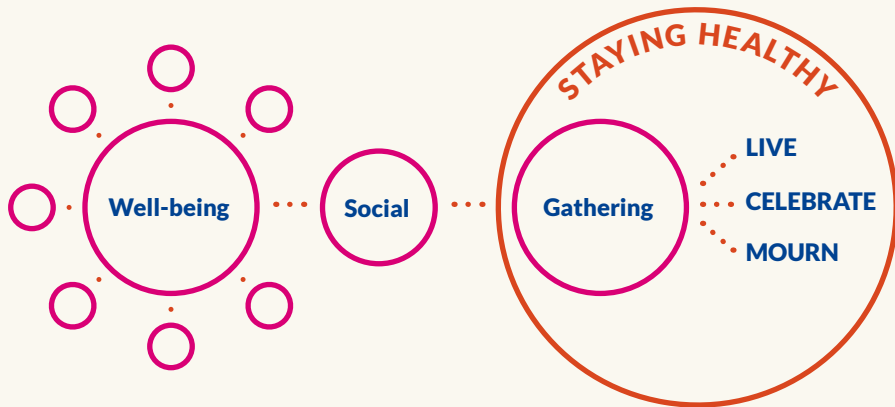
# Cross-Cultural

## Cross-cultural & multiracial coalitions

Actively create cross-cultural, multiracial coalitions.

## Ethnic & community-based media

Work with ethnic media, community-based media.

## Multilingual importance

If it's important, make it multilingual.

## Culturally-specific & cross-cultural campaigns

Keep Native American/Indigenous, African American/Black, Hispanic/Latine/Latinx, Pacific Islander, and BIPOC communities centered with culturally-specific and cross-cultural campaigns.

## Yes/And thinking

Use Yes/And not Either/Or thinking to reach all people of color and move with mutual respect.

# Intergenerational Communication

### Different generations resonate differently

Be mindful that different generations in the same communities may resonate with different forms of communication.

### Different ages use different channels

Track how people of different ages use different channels. For example, young people used livestreams on TikTok and Twitch. Cross generations may have used social media like Facebook and Instagram or podcasts. Radio and word of mouth may be the most democratic for low-income communities without internet.

### Easier text messaging

Remember we often share info over cell phone, so make things easy to share via text messaging.

# Isolation

### Bring certain communities to the forefront

Bring incarcerated, housing and food insecure, no/low-income communities to the forefront of our community work.

### Humanize people

Stay ready to help humanize people who are easily pushed aside in a world divided by income, race, and myths about worthiness.

# Purpose

### Strength & unity

Know that we have strength in numbers. Unity allows us to create amazing solutions together that solve our problems both caringly and effectively.

### Sense of meaning & shared purpose

Understand community members collectively need to feel a sense of meaning and shared purpose. Connection is how we know we are not alone. We need each other and we need institutions that are willing to change.

"It blew folks out of their comfort zones

and into direct action.

It, for a moment, opened up the collective conscience

and moral soul of the people, in an era not seen before.

It unmasked us all, for a spell."

—Jordan Chaney

Thank you for taking the time to read this report and add its insights to the important work you do.

**Washington State Department of HEALTH**

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To request this document in another format, call 1-800-525-0127.
Deaf or hard of hearing customers, please call 711 (Washington Relay) or email doh.information@doh.wa.gov.