



COVID – 19 Equity Council

**Led by Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Secretary Womazetta Jones**

September 2020 Progress Report

Working together for healthy and strong communities

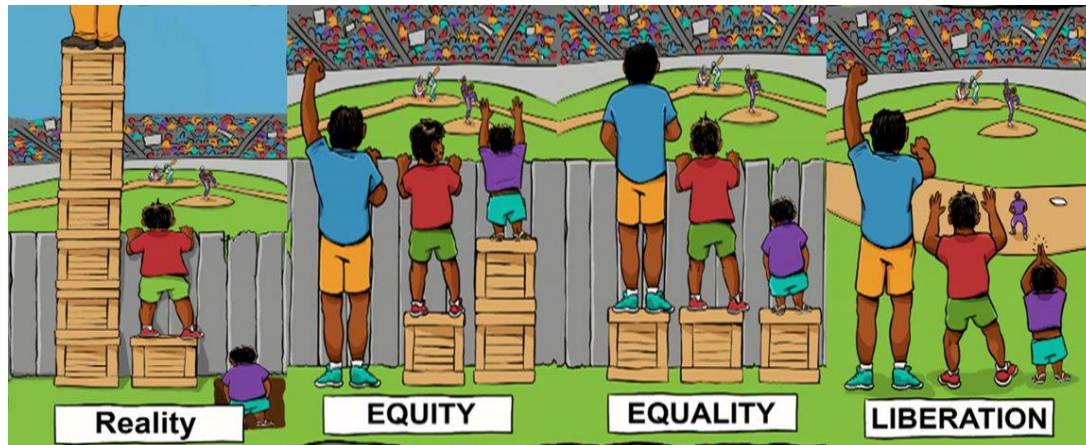
The **Equity Considerations Planning Team** works across all state reopening workstreams and with the **COVID-19 Equity Council**. The COVID-19 Equity Council is an advisory council created to address the impacts of this virus in high density areas, poor neighborhoods and communities of color.

Structural, institutional and internalized inequities are at the core of the disproportionate impact COVID-19 is having in these cities, towns and neighborhoods.

It is our vision that we **not only recover from the current pandemic, but work together to fight systemic racism and injustice.**

History

The COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd in 2020 highlighted the **racial inequities that impact communities of color in Rhode Island**.



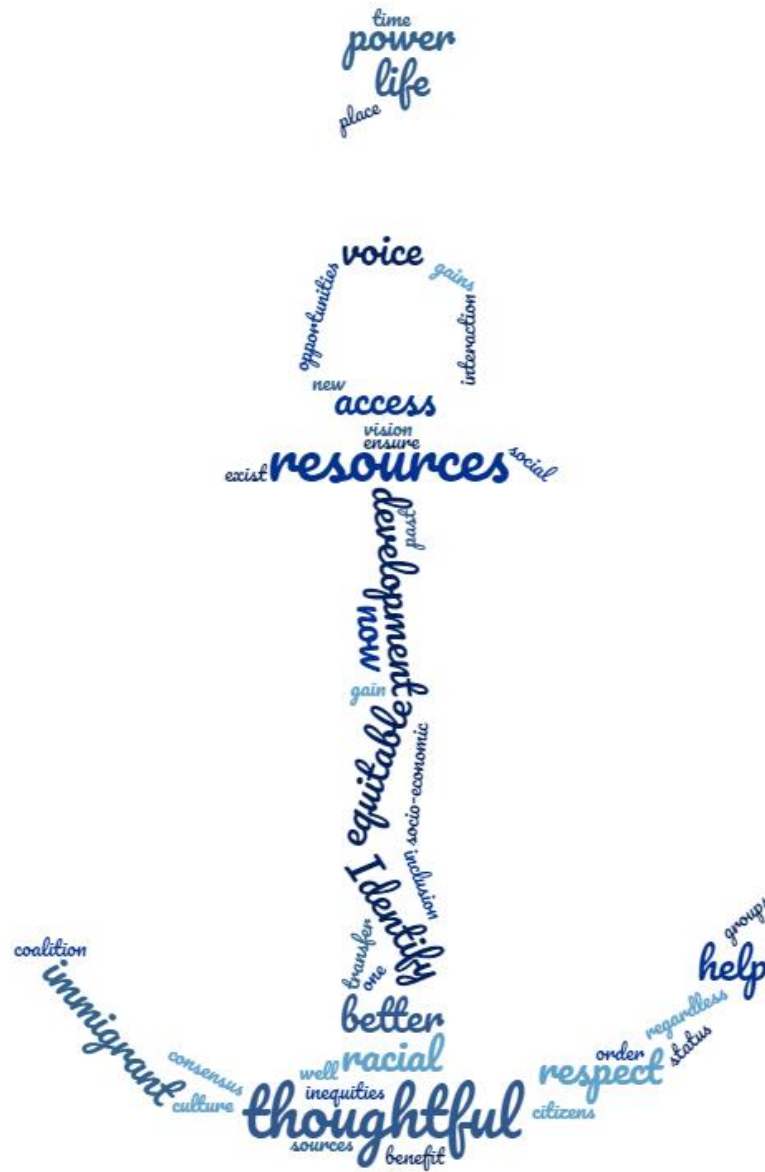
The Equity Council meets weekly to **review and discuss programs and initiatives created to respond to the crisis**. To date, there have been presentations and discussions on housing, COVID-19 data, school reopening, employment programs and many others.

- **April 2020 – Governor Raimondo created the Latino Advisory Group** as a response to the high impact of COVID-19 on the Latino community.

April 24, 2020 – First Meeting

- **May 2020 - The Governor expanded the focus, and membership creating the new COVID-19 Equity Council**. The Equity Council is comprised of a diverse group of leaders from communities of color including elected officials, religious leaders, educators, and other community leaders. The Council's role is to advise the administration on COVID -19 response and recovery, share and disseminate information.

May 22, 2020 – First Equity Council Meeting



Action-Oriented Equity Council

The Equity Council consists of **a diverse mix of community leaders of color and State staff committed to work that leads to meaningful action.** This Rhode Island anchor word cloud represents the change society demands.

Equity Council

Community

Chris Abhulime

Senior Pastor - The King's Tabernacle

Theresa Agonia

Sr. Deputy Chief of Staff - Mayor Elorza's Office/City of Providence

Angela Ankoma

Executive Vice President, Director of Community Investment - United Way of Rhode Island

Omar Bah

Executive Director - Refugee Dream Center

Guillaume Bagal

VP of Diversity and Inclusion – United Natural Foods Inc.

Marcela Betancur

Executive Director - Latino Policy Institute

Kapedjanie “Kappy” Bois

Vice President, Doctor - Haitian American Partnership for Positive Actions

Moise Bourdeau

Community Leader - Haitian Community

Kiah Bryant

Director - DARE

Mario Bueno

Executive Director - Progreso Latino

Channavy Chhay

Executive Director - Center of Southeast Asians

Kristina Contreras Fox

Policy Analyst - RI Homeless Coalition

Dr. Luis-Daniel Muñoz

Physician

Grace Diaz

Rhode Island State Representative

James Diosa

Mayor of Central Falls

Aniece Germain

Assistant Director - Hope & Change for Haiti

Norly Germain

Assistant Director - Hope & Change for Haiti

Equity Council

Roberto Gonzalez

Executive Director – Steambox

Sabina Matos

President - Providence City Council

Harold Metts

Rhode Island State Senator

Tiana Ochoa

Director of Mentoring Programs - Big Brothers/Big Sisters of RI

Elmer Pina

President - Cape Verdean American Community Development of RI

Ana Quezada

Rhode Island State Senator

Cynthia Roberts

Co-Chair - Commission for Health Advocacy & Equity

Dr. Pablo Rodriguez

Medical Director Community Affairs – Care New England

Dr. Francisco Trilla

Chief Medical Officer, Vice President Public Plans - Tuft Health Plan

Jim Vincent

President - NAACP RI

Darrell Waldron

Executive Director - RI Indian Council

Larry Warner

Co-Chair - Commission for Health Advocacy & Equity

Henrietta White-Holder

Founder & CEO - Higher Ground International

Anastasia Williams

Rhode Island State Representative

Equity Council

State Staff

Womazetta Jones

Secretary - RI Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Anthony Aquino

Office Manager - Office of Governor Gina Raimondo

Jennifer Fondeur

Special Assistant to the Governor - Office of Governor Gina Raimondo

Rose Jones

Director - RI Office of Healthy Aging

Dorinda Keene

Acting Associate Director and Assistant Administrator - RI Department of Administration, Office of Diversity, Equity and Opportunity (ODEO & MBE)

Yvette Mendez

Chief of Staff – RI Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS)

Larome Myrick

Executive Director, Juvenile Correction Services - RI Department of Children, Youth and Families

Ana Novais

Assistant Secretary - RI Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Alisha Pina

Chief Public Affairs Officer - RI Department of Human Services

Marti Rosenberg

Director of Policy, Planning and Research - RI Executive Office of Health and Human Services

Joseph Sacks

Director of Public Engagement - Office of Governor Gina Raimondo

Maria Sansivieri

Administrator of Program Management - RI Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities & Hospitals

Michelle Wilson

Assistant Health Program Administrator - RI Department of Health, Office of Race, Equity & Inclusion

Kasim Yarn

Director - Rhode Island Office of Veterans Services

And additional support from others

Progress

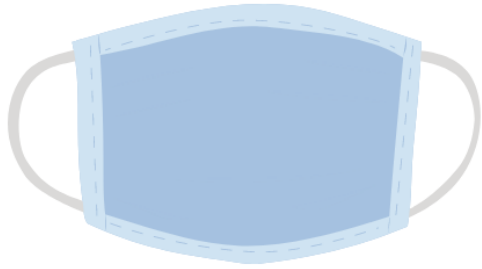
*The Equity Council and state Equity Considerations Workstream have **led, participated in, or initiated several accomplishments in multiple life-impacting categories.***

- Helped provide basic health & safety needs for all Rhode Islanders
- Expanded culturally relevant services and programs
- Extended reach with culturally-competent communications
- Elevated concerns from communities and leaders of color
- Improved testing, contact tracing and data strategies
- Ensured equity was a central focus of the State response

Community Support



Health & Safety Needs



Masks

- **More than 1 million masks delivered** to Health Equity Zones, community partners, churches and at events at the State House, such as Black Lives Matter and *My Response* events

Food Security

- **BeSafe+ grocery and supply box program** provided free resources to elders and their families in need
- Launched **Food+Fitness “hot meals” program** support grandparents raising grandchildren in areas hardest hit by COVID-19. Food is sourced through local, ethnic restaurants.



- **Expanded Meals On Wheels ‘grab n’ go’ and home-delivered meals service statewide:** introduced new Latino and Asian menus, a new café program at Higher Ground International, and a more diverse restaurant program
- Helped the Center for Southeast Asians & Higher Ground International with their **food distribution events**
- **Free milk** for community residents

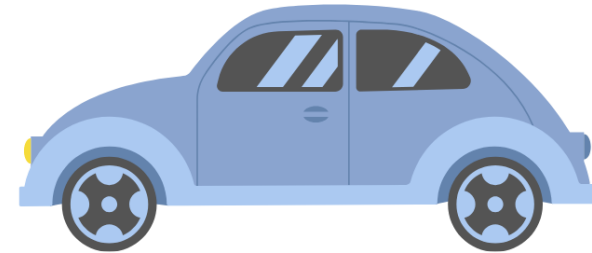
Health & Safety Needs (Cont.)



Income Replacement

- Raised **\$3 million** for the weR1 fund, a **cash relief fund for Rhode Island's undocumented population**
- Over 300 \$400 debit cards have been distributed to families in need
- The program will serve a minimum of 7,000 families

Transportation And Accessibility

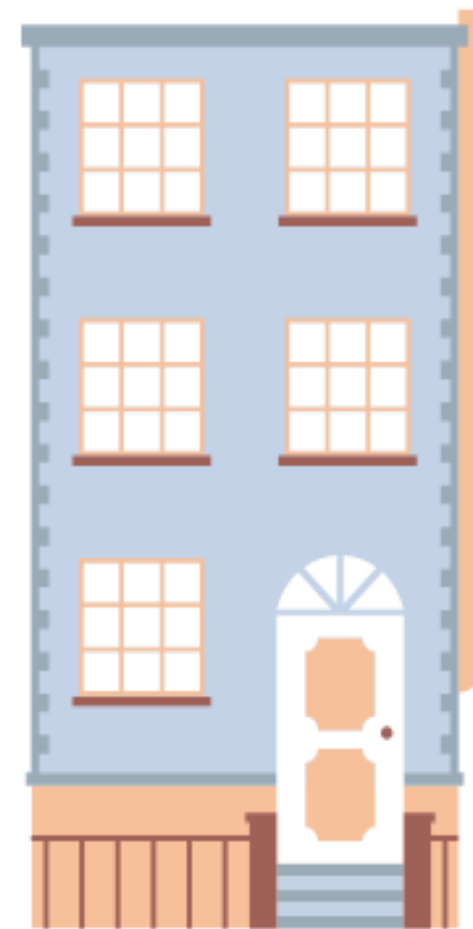


- Connected individuals in need with **transportation to testing facilities**
- **RI Delivers delivered food and medication** to seniors in need, through Office of Healthy Aging

Health & Safety Needs (Cont.)

Housing and Anti-Eviction

- The Governor is supporting a **\$40 million** investment in **affordable housing and community revitalization**
- **\$7 million** in CARES act funding toward **eviction diversion** through the Safe Harbor Housing Program
- RI Havens – Online portal offering **discounted rates at local hotels** to frontline workers and others who need a place to stay
- **Rental assistance fund and HousinghelpRI.com** - **\$6.5 million** available to families at risk of homelessness due to COVID-19
- Developed the **Housing NOW Shelter Reduction Program**, in which the State rents vacant properties directly from owners in order to provide community members in need with housing



Culturally Competent Communications

- Translated key documents into 12 languages informed by the community to increase access to vital mitigation and guidance documents: health.ri.gov/covid/multiplelanguages
- Developed clearer signage at COVID-19 testing sites
- Created communications materials promoting State assistance and programs
 - Commerce RI resources: Small Business Administration (SBA), Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL), SupplyRI, CARES Act Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), free technology, personal protective equipment (PPE) and supplies for small businesses
 - Testing locations
 - Quarantine & isolation
- Referred communication professionals of color to the State and amplified the State's commitment to a diverse Community Outreach and Reinforcement Program (CORP) team



Culturally Competent Communications (Cont.)



- Expanded the reach of State **communications in high-density communities and communities of color**
 - Social media testing campaign in Spanish
 - Plain language and translation review
 - Video and graphic assistance
 - Radio promotions in Spanish by Latino Advisory Group members
 - Press conference briefings in multiple languages
 - WhatsApp messaging for non-English speaking populations
 - Connected community members of color for a State community assessment
- Worked with State communications staff, Health Equity Zone partners and community and state leaders of color to collaboratively ensure a **culturally and linguistically appropriate communications campaign**



Streamlined Testing Procedures

- Notified State when residents were being charged for office visits for COVID-19 testing, and State worked to **secure reimbursements and better communicate free testing sites**
- Created **walk-up testing site in Central Falls**
- Worked with RIDOH Director, Dr. Alexander-Scott for **statewide testing without doctor referral**

Testing Accessibility

Accessible Testing Locations

- **Amplified RIDOH's COVID-19 Testing Site Locator** in communities of color
- **Engaged, created, and provided technical assistance and communications to multiple mobile testing sites**
- Ongoing locations include:
 - Higher Ground International – Providence
 - Bethel AME – Providence
 - Center for Southeast Asians – Providence
 - Elmwood Ave. Church of God – Providence
 - Indian Council – Providence
 - Progreso Latino – Central Falls
 - Boys and Girls Club – Woonsocket
 - Wat Lao – Woonsocket



Elevated Concerns of Communities of Color

- **Serology testing expanded** to Stop & Shop and other grocery stores used in communities of color
- **Testing in high-rise apartment buildings**
- **Testing outreach and priority to key businesses industries**, such as manufacturing

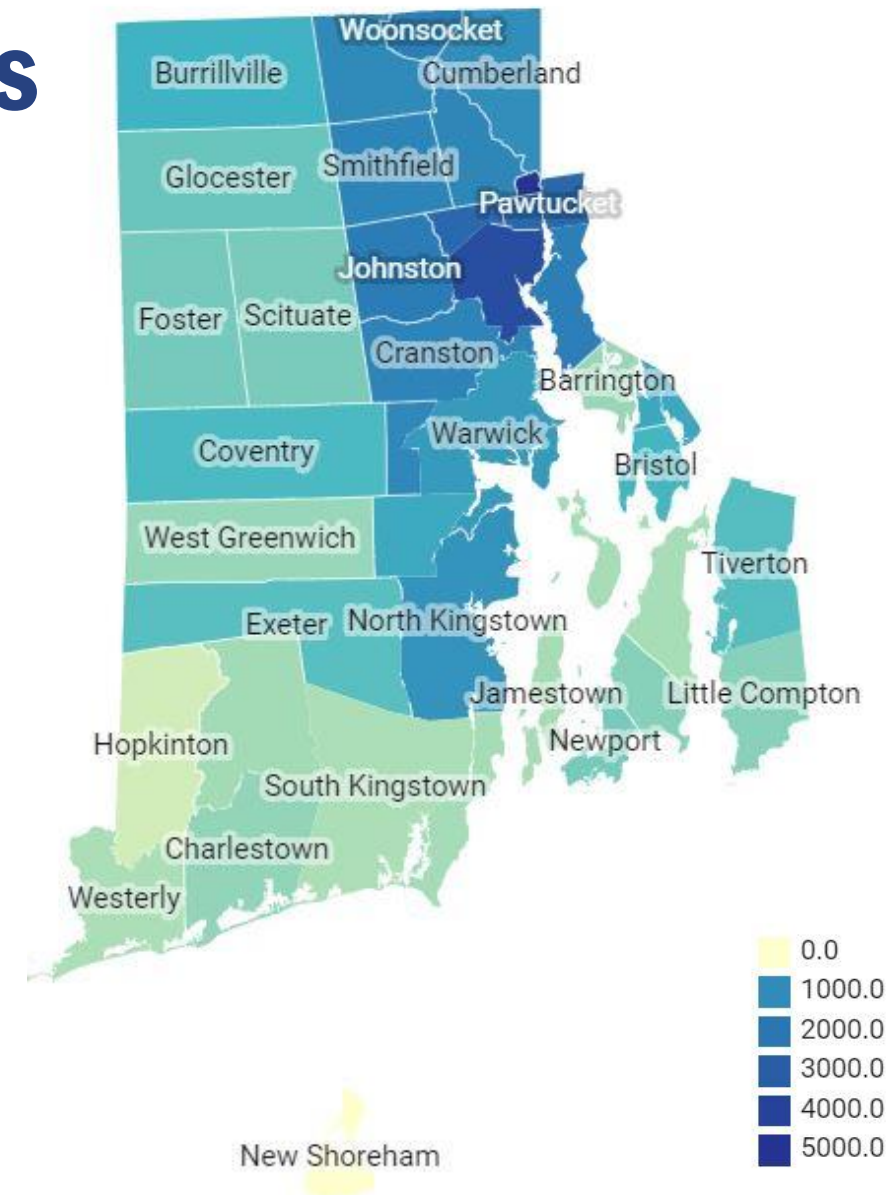
Contact Tracing & Data Strategies

Contact Tracing

- Connected State with **communities of color** to **assist with contract tracing**
- **Developed #crushCOVID app** to facilitate contact tracing

Data

- Shared concerns about increased methods for data analysis
 - Separated nursing home mortality data from **community mortality data**
 - Enhanced **COVID-19 rates by community, race, and ethnicity**
 - Gave feedback regarding **identifications options**



Community & Media Connections

- **Established community leader discussion sessions with Secretary Womazetta Jones**
 - Tomas Avila – Milenio Latino Institute
 - Pastor Jenkins – Bethel AME Church
 - Pastor Chris Abhulime – The King’s Tabernacle & African Alliance of RI
 - Brother Garry Dantzler – Black Lives Matters (ongoing)
 - Ministers Alliance of Rhode Island – Monthly Zoom Calls
 - Jim Vincent – NAACP-Providence
 - Praise Tabernacle, YouthBuild and Lights & Sirens Ltd.
 - RI youth speaking on events related to COVID-19 and Race Relations
- **Speaking and media engagements about Equity**
 - *Praying for Our Nation* event at the State House
 - Black Lives Matter women’s event at the State House
 - Lifespan testing press conference at Bethel AME
 - National Association of Medicaid Directors (NAMD)
 - *Rise Together* Equity Plan event at a local park
 - *My Response* event at the State House Poder 1110AM/102FM
 - WJAR – Race in Rhode Island: The Path Forward
 - FBlive – Sesión Informativa sobre los recursos disponibles para los pequeños negocios frente al COVID-19
 - FBlive – Governor Raimondo’s Education series: Equity and Schools



Open Conversation & Learning

- Set up meetings for State leaders to speak with various communities
 - **Healthy Aging Town Hall** – Discussed issues facing elders, with focus on communities of color and those hardest hit by COVID
 - **weR1 virtual press conference** with Gov. Raimondo - Promoted the importance of the weR1 fund and solicit donations
 - **Violence Prevention Town Hall** with Gov. Raimondo - Discussed impact of violence, especially in our communities of color, and available resources for those affected
- Ensured all RI voices are shared with State leadership and community concerns were addressed
 - **Helped with unemployment issues** impacting the refugee community
 - Coordinated training with the High-Density Settings Support Team and faith leaders on **mitigation strategies for the faith community and small businesses in high-density communities**
 - Connected United Way, Census RI and Higher Ground for **Census registrations** at food distributions

Presentations & Discussions

(May 2020 to Present)

- Manufacturing Inspections
- High Risk Communities
- Business Resources
- RI Office of Diversity, Equity, and Opportunity
- Testing and Contact Tracing
- Medicaid Program
- Homeless Response
- Housing Assistance Programs
- Higher Education Reopening
- K-12 Reopening Plans
- Individual Supports & Healthy Aging Initiatives
- Back to Work RI
- Census 2020
- Medicaid Equity
- Data Update
- Public Transportation

Looking Ahead

- Continue to address **Immediate Community Needs**
 - Basic supply assistance
 - Accurate information
- **Influence Policy**
 - Medicaid Social Determinants of Investment strategy – open for public comments



For more information, please contact Secretary Womazetta Jones
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