
Council focuses on promoting solutions to racial, ethnic inequality

Tales from the Garden, #13



By: The Minnesota Department of Human Services

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS) recently hosted a weeklong workshop aimed at guiding and empowering policymakers and community leaders to develop and promote solutions to racism and racial and ethnic inequity. Participants, including DHS and Minnesota Department of Health staff, community leaders and members of the Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council (CECLC) received training on problem structuring and policy analysis tools related to racial and ethnic inequity.

According to Antonia Wilcoxon, DHS' community relations director, council members, DHS staff and other state employees and community leaders participated in the program to receive an introduction to policy analysis and to help build capacity as leaders in local community-based organizations to use the tools of policy analysis and evaluation to be able to develop and promote solutions to the problems of racism and ethnic inequity.

The Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council, established by the Minnesota Legislature in 2013, advises the Human Services commissioner on reducing disparities that affect racial and ethnic groups in human services programs and ensure that departmental policies and procedures are aligned to promote the best possible outcomes for all Minnesotans. Council members represent Health and Human Services committees at the Legislature; racial and ethnic minority groups; service providers for the American Indian community; culturally and linguistically specific advocacy groups and service providers; human services program participants; public and private institutions; parents of human services program participants; members of the faith community; and DHS employees.

Dr. Sam Myers Roy Wilkins Center for Human Relations and Social Justice at the University of Minnesota Humphrey School of Public Affairs led the training, held March 14 to 18. Participants gathered at the Elmer L. Andersen Human Services Building in St. Paul March 18 to give presentations on their projects.

DHS Assistant Commissioner Anne Barry, who oversees Community and Partner Relations, said that the training was valuable for her in her role leading department staff who draft human services policy.

“I’ve been on a very long journey to understand how it is that we know there are inequities in outcomes for people of color and American Indians in so many measures of health and well-being, yet we haven’t changed the way we approach inequities,” Barry said. “What I learned in this class is to firm up my understanding that we must begin with deconstructing any problem with a perspective that includes those who are experiencing the inequity. And, more importantly, our policy analysis can’t begin until we get the voice of those impacted by our analysis and our decisions.”



Nyagatare Valens, a grants specialist at the Minnesota Department of Education who represents diverse cultural and ethnic communities on the council, developed a policy brief on employment disparities working on a team project during the workshop and said the training helped reinforce the council's work.

“**I** hope the state of Minnesota should be always ahead of the curve, not constantly playing catch up, when trying to improve the well-being of all Minnesotans, including people of color,” he said.

LaRone Greer, a DHS employee in the Children's Mental Health Division, said the training helped him understand how others see problems and the impacts on people of different races and ethnicities.

“**I**'ve now learned how to use my personal experience and speak in a policy language that is used by those who develop and implement policy,” he said.

More information about the Cultural and Ethnic Communities Leadership Council can be found on the [DHS website](#).