COMMITMENT TO
RACIAL EQUITY
BY BHN & COMMUNITY PARTNERS
Members of the Behavioral Health Network commit to addressing, individually and collectively, obstacles to racial equity that impede the fair and equitable treatment of members of the St. Louis community.

The Behavioral Health Network’s Racial Equity Principles are a framework to communicate the St. Louis behavioral health community’s pledge to reforming systems of bias, discrimination, and oppression, strengthening underserved communities, advocating inclusion, and removing barriers to achievement.

Although the organizations represented in the BHN have made their own individual statements and pledges, this unified approach sends an important signal about BHN’s collective commitment. The Principles articulate how BHN and individual organizations can commit to advancing racial equity within their organizations and throughout our community.

As leaders, we commit to the following principles and will promote the application of these principles within our spheres of influence:
COMMUNICATION & DIALOGUE

We will regularly engage with and listen to the communities we serve to deepen our understanding of the inequities experienced and together, seek lasting solutions.

We will use a shared language and definitions to normalize conversations and support and encourage uniform understanding.

We will acknowledge missteps and correct course when warranted.

We are committed to transparency and will be intentional about all our communication.

We know that advancing racial equity requires a willingness to be uncomfortable and we will work to create a brave space to foster authentic conversations and meaningful change.

We will create and support spaces that are authentically welcoming, inclusive, and accessible.

COLLABORATION, COMMUNITY VOICE, & SHARED DECISION MAKING

We support advancing equity in the communities in which we live and operate, understanding that our long-term success depends on our shared progress.

We will practice and encourage behaviors that build trust and understanding rather than resentment and bias.

We commit to centering community voice and shared decision making by creating opportunities for the people we serve, ensuring they have an active role in decision making and crediting them for their contribution.

We commit to creating, implementing, and transforming programs by building relationships and engaging in collaborative partnerships that are created for and accountable to people of color.

We commit to a process of shared decision making, power sharing, and recognizing and valuing expertise that exists in communities by including organizations that are led by people of color.
We will actively identify and call out processes and spaces where power is not shared equitably, including exploitation of people and resources.

We recognize the influence of the communities and systems in which we work.

We will embed targeted recruitment and hiring efforts to diversify staff, partners, and funders to better reflect the demographics and lived experiences of those our collaborative projects serve.

DATA, EVALUATION, & EQUITABLE OUTCOMES

We commit to drilling down into the data to identify inequities that underlie racial and ethnic differences in outcomes, using disaggregated data by race, gender, class and other characteristics to better document and track disparities.

We commit to advancing the use of disaggregated data across the network.

We will use the data to inform shared decision making and affect systems change and impact funding and resources.

We will critically evaluate our programmatic work to specifically examine to the extent to which programs decrease racial disparities, particularly in systems and settings known to negatively impact people of color and other marginalized groups.

LEARNING & ADAPTING

We commit to continuous improvement by routinely participating in anti-racist learning opportunities to deepen our collective consciousness of oppression and expand our personal commitment to acting as agents of social change.

We will identify concrete ways within our own institutions to prioritize services to those most impacted by racial injustice.

We acknowledge that we all have implicit biases, and that as leaders we need to check our biases by inviting other voices and perspectives to the table.

We will identify ways that BHN can support and amplify the work of local agencies and organizations already engaged in explicit equity work.

We commit to a culture of trying by acknowledging our mistakes, sharing what we learn, being accountable for making changes, and fostering an openness to ongoing growth and learning.
**VITAL CONTEXTUAL DEFINITIONS**

**WHITENESS**
Whiteness is a deeply relational and constantly shifting boundary. Operating at all times and on myriad levels across history, the essential idea of whiteness separates those who are entitled to have certain privileges from those whose exploitation is justified by their not being white.

**WHITE PRIVILEGE**
Unearned advantages, entitlements, benefits and choices bestowed on humans solely because they are white. Generally, white humans who experience such privilege do so without being conscious of it. Because hierarchies of privilege exist, even within the same group, note that “privilege” does not equal “without struggle.”

**WHITE SUPREMACY CULTURE**
The dominant, unquestioned standards of behavior and ways of functioning embodied by the vast majority of institutions in the United States. These standards are likely seen as “mainstream.” Because it is so normalized it can be hard to see, which only adds to its powerful hold.

**CULTURE**
A social system of meaning and custom that is developed by a group of people to assure its adaptation and survival. These groups are distinguished by a set of unspoken rules that shape values, beliefs, habits, patterns of thinking, behaviors and styles of communication.

**RACIAL EQUITY**
A state in which a person’s life outcomes cannot be predicted by race.

**BIAS**
The story that we tell about other people before we know them. Regardless of our identity, we all have implicit bias.

**INSTITUTIONAL RACISM**
Policies, practices and procedures that work better for white people than for People of Color, regardless of intention. Institutional racism refers specifically to the ways in which institutional policies and practices create different outcomes for different racial groups.

*Definitions taken from Gladiator Consulting, “Building a Culture of Equity: A Report-Out of Work Completed and Recommended Next Steps” final report, October 2020*
If you or your agency are interested in joining the **Racial Equity Steering Committee**, please reach out through any of the below channels:

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- **bhn@bhnstl.org**
- **bhnstl.org**
- **2 Campbell Plaza, 1B Plaza Entry**
  **St. Louis, MO 63139**