

VITAL SIGNS

Perspectives of the president of APHA

We have struggled, but change is coming

Public health faces challenges, but we will overcome them

AS WE'VE WORKED in support of public health over the past year and a half, many of us have keenly felt the challenges of the ongoing social and political climate.

It hasn't been easy, and it won't be for a good while. But despite this gut-punch of an era — which has been a real wake-up call for all of us, particularly in regard to social justice and inequalities — change is definitely coming.

People who work in our field — as well as those studying in our schools, colleges and related programs — are motivated by the public health community's mission to save the world.

Through hard work, perseverance and even personal sacrifice, we seek to make sure those who are the least among us have every opportunity to access health and wellness. And together,

we are working to ensure that the future of public health will be sustained and thrive, despite the challenges of our times.

I'm reminded of a similar period in our nation's recent history, during the height of the U.S. civil rights movement, when people who were marginalized and discounted — socially, academically, politically and economically — began to have a voice of influence. Their voices made Americans and people around the world realize that the status quo was facing a period of tribulation it could not ignore.

A poet at the time, the late Gil Scott-Heron, not only captured the zeitgeist of that historic period, but the esprit de corps that became evident everywhere. In 1971, he wrote

that "You will not be able to stay home, brother. You will not be able to plug in, turn on and cop out...The revolution will not be televised...The revolution will be no rerun, brother. The revolution will be live."

As I close out this once-in-a-lifetime, phenomenal honor in service as APHA's president, I am reminded of the historic realities we as a community have chosen not to ignore and cop out, but to take head-on by not staying

home. We have led the revolution by aggressively pushing back against policies and actions designed to diminish or eliminate our hard-won gains.

We can and will overcome. We can and will make our country and the broader world a much better place. We can advance. We will make our little drops of water into a mighty ocean.

I am honored to have been given the opportunity to use this column to advocate and support what we value and will continue to do so moving forward.

The revolution is live. Thank you. ■

Joseph Telfair,
DrPH, MPH, MSW
president@apha.org



Annual Meeting session to feature Special Olympics athletes APHA work focuses on inclusion, disability health

HEALTH EQUITY means that all people can reach the highest standard of health, including people with disabilities. Striving toward that goal, APHA is ramping up its work on inclusive health, which calls for the deliberate inclusion of people with disabilities in policies, programming and services.

In a project spearheaded by former APHA President Tom Quade, MPH, MA, CPH, more than 300 state, local and territorial public health departments were surveyed to assess the degree to which people with intellectual and developmental disabilities are intentionally included in community health assessments and planning. The findings showed that U.S. public health departments largely do not report intentionally including people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in processes such as identifying barriers to health and providing input about health equity in all policies.

As part of its ongoing inclusive health work, APHA is also working with the Council on Education for Public Health to look at intentionally including people with intellectual disabilities in standards for public health education. The new work complements activities through APHA's Disability Section, which has been working to improve health equity among people with disabilities for 30 years.

The theme of inclusive health will continue at APHA's 2018 Annual Meeting and Expo in San Diego. Quade's APHA Past President Session will feature three Special Olympic athletes discussing barriers to health equity for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and how such challenges can be overcome with their involvement. The session comes on the heels of APHA being named an Emerging Champion of Inclusive Health by the Special Olympics earlier this year.

It was particularly important that the APHA Past President Session feature speakers with intellectual and developmental

disabilities discussing their own experiences instead of having people talk for them, Quade said. He encouraged public health workers to listen to the communities they are serving and ask what solutions work best for them. It is also incumbent upon practitioners to learn the specific needs of underserved populations and avoid making broad assumptions, said Quade, an APHA member.

"When we're dealing with health equity in general, that (one-size-fits-all)...approach does not fit everyone, and the folks that we're trying to help to remove barriers are probably pretty skilled at removing those barriers," he told *The Nation's Health*.

There are about 6.5 million people in the U.S. with an intellectual disability, according to the Special Olympics. Even though they make up a significant share of the population, they tend to be overlooked in conversations about health equity, Quade said. Public health workers must have an intentional approach to working with underserved populations such as people with disabilities to ensure that all voices are being heard.

Health equity is critical to people with intellectual disabilities, who have disproportionately worse health outcomes compared with the general population. According to the Special Olympics, they are more likely to have chronic conditions such as asthma, diabetes and cardiovascular disease and are also more

likely to have multiple chronic conditions. Many of the chronic conditions affecting people with intellectual disabilities can be prevented with improved access to health care services, said Stephanie Corbett, manager of external health communications for the Special Olympics.

"The reason we're focusing on this group is to really right this injustice," she told *The Nation's Health*. "And by thinking about inclusive health for this population, it can change your mindset, it can improve access for everybody."

The Special Olympics is highlighting such health inequities with its new International Center for Inclusive Health, which offers resources for incorporating inclusive health practices within and outside public health. Corbett said the center aims to be a community space in which people can communicate about inclusive health, share resources and support one another. The center also offers information on inclusive health practices specific to health care providers, fitness and wellness professionals, professional associations and businesses.

For more information on the Center for Inclusive Health, visit <https://inclusivehealth.specialolympics.org>. The APHA Past President Session, number 3227, is Monday, Nov. 12, at 1 p.m. For more information, visit www.apha.org/annualmeeting. ■

— Julia Haskins



Photo by Gregory Rec, courtesy Portland Press Herald/Getty Images

Zachary O'Brion, 10, celebrates his third-place finish in his heat of the 100-meter dash at the Cumberland County Special Olympics competition in April in Buxton, Maine. APHA is partnering with the Special Olympics for an Annual Meeting session.