Lack of guidelines, siloed data sources, and incomplete data hamper efforts to reduce racial health disparities in Connecticut, report finds

NEW HAVEN – Although Connecticut achieves high ratings on many healthcare indicators, wide disparities by race and ethnicity dominate the state’s health care system, with White residents having better access to care and health outcomes compared to people of color.

According to a new report from Connecticut Voices for Children, closing these disparities has proven difficult in part because state agencies lack consistent, reliable data to identify community needs and evaluate innovations, with serious consequences both for the impacted communities and the state as a whole.

"The lack of reliable, consistent health equity data in Connecticut means that the state is flying in the dark when trying to address health disparities, with a negative impact on the communities affected and on Connecticut as a whole." says Karen Siegel, Health Policy Fellow at Connecticut Voices for Children. "When our systems fail portions of our population, our state is less vital, spends more on preventable disease and disabilities, and may even have a less prepared workforce."

The report finds health data dispersed over several data sources and agencies: census surveys, reports produced by state agencies for federal regulators, four separate state data portals, a host of sporadic agency reports, data produced by local agencies, and several private data sources. Each report follows a different structure and format, with no shared guidelines or definitions, often failing to include comparable, reliable race and ethnicity information. Although state agencies have enough information to undertake basic analysis of health disparities, this information is siloed and largely inaccessible.

The report recommends establishing a set of shared reporting guidelines for state agencies, as well as shared practices to improve data collection. This would require integrating datasets across agencies, using consistent formats and methods that allow the analysis of disaggregated data by detailed race and ethnicity categories, and the committing to a unified state data portal across agencies.

"Closing disparities is important as a matter of basic human rights as well as enlightened economic self-interest," says Ellen Shemitz, Executive Director at Connecticut Voices for Children. "Improving how we use data enables us to make strategic investments to ensure child and family well-being and to advance shared opportunity."
About Connecticut Voices for Children: Connecticut Voices for Children is a research-based child advocacy organization working to ensure that all Connecticut children have an equitable opportunity to achieve their full potential. In furtherance of its mission, Connecticut Voices for Children produces high-quality research and analysis, promotes citizen education, advocates for policy change at the state and local level, and works to develop the next generation of leaders.