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DMS Information Memo 2020-01

To: County Human Services Directors for the  
Children's Long-Term Support Waiver and  
Birth to 3 Programs

From: Jim Jones, Medicaid Director  
Division of Medicaid Services

**Facing Racial Injustice and Improving Health Equity in Wisconsin Children's Services Programs**

The purpose of this informational memo is to raise awareness of the systemic racism in Wisconsin's health care system; focus attention on the public health crises that result from this racism; and initiate planning for the steps necessary to address racism in programs administered through Medicaid, beginning with the Children's Long-Term Support (CLTS) Waiver Program and the Birth to 3 Program.

**BACKGROUND**

Racial injustice and inequity have become the central topics in a national dialogue in 2020. Americans have gained increased awareness of systemic racism as the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has disproportionately impacted people of color and other marginalized populations. As of October 2020, Black and Hispanic populations are over-represented among COVID-19 cases, hospitalizations, and deaths. Compared to White Wisconsinites, Hispanic or Latinx Wisconsinites have 2.3 times greater case rates, and Black Wisconsinites have 3.0 times greater hospitalization rates and 2.3 times greater death rates.

In many ways, the pandemic's disproportionate impact underscores what we already knew: racial injustice and inequity negatively impact health. Wisconsin ranks poorly on a number of metrics for health care access, service delivery, and outcomes among Black persons, including ranking the worst in the nation on infant mortality rates for Black babies. As a national leader in many long-term care programs and among the most successful states in supporting individuals with disabilities, Wisconsin must take action to reverse our course in these areas where we are falling unacceptably short.

**COMMITMENT TO ENACTING CHANGE**

As a critical system of health care access for one in three children in our state, Wisconsin Medicaid has a responsibility to address this crisis and help to create change. As our partners in the provision of program services, we are looking to county health and human services agencies to join us in developing a blueprint for a better future for all children and families. This blueprint will be created with heightened attention to equity of access and service provision, and improved outcomes for Black children and families in our children's services programs.

The repercussions of systemic racism on Black individuals and families and other communities of color did not happen overnight and will require concentrated, ongoing efforts to meaningfully achieve positive change. To get started, the Bureau of Children's Services is planning to focus 2021 on using training and data analysis to promote

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increased knowledge and understanding to drive improvements. We will engage our program councils, including the Interagency Coordination Council and Children's Long Term Support Council to explore policy efforts that can contribute to improving outcomes for Black children in our programs. As the face and hands of our Birth to 3 and CLTS Waiver Programs, you are a crucial component in this endeavor. We invite you to reach out and share your ideas about the local work each of you are engaged in that we could consider implementing statewide.

The Bureau of Children's Services will continue to look for pathways to solicit continuous engagement of all partners who share our vision of creating an equitable future, developing antiracism policies and practices, and achieving an inclusive and equitable future for children and families who access supports. As we work to collaborate and coordinate efforts to address this health care crisis, please share any suggestions or ideas you may have to propel us forward.