

# Consumer Health Foundation Do we know what we are trying to fix? Racial Equity in the Movement to End Homelessness

By Amanda Misiko Andere, Chief Executive Officer, Funders Together to End Homelessness



I've worked in human services and ending homelessness for over 14 years, both locally and nationally. Finally, the movement is starting to talk about race. And, not just reporting the number of people of color we serve when asked about racial equity or diversity. For the first time the national movement is using words like “disproportionality”, “equity” (not equality), “[dominant white culture](#)”, and “structural racism” as it relates directly to our challenges in ending homelessness.

Thanks to the leadership of [SPARC](#) at the [Center for Social Innovation](#), for the last 3 years we've raised the visibility of the historic and current structural racism that has led to racial disparities in the homeless system.

***For example, although Black people comprise 13% of the general population in the United States and 26% of those living in poverty, they account for more than 40% of the homeless population, suggesting that poverty rates alone do not explain the over-representation.***

I think we are in an awakening. Some are getting to woke, but the goal is to work woke and create a racial equity culture in our movement. This culture is one where centering racial and LGBTQ equity is not something only some organizations and leaders talk about or start to do, but it is embedded in our way of thinking, much like housing first. It's one where the focus is not on fixing people, but centered on changing the system and addressing the root causes of homelessness.

So how do we go from woke to working woke?

- Start, don't end, with data. It's not enough to disaggregate data of who is becoming homeless from the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). That should be the tool to get your community focused on the problem. We should be doing a racial equity analysis and disaggregating data from every gatekeeper within the system.
- Realize the tools, policies, and analysis we have used within the system to determine vulnerability or prioritize housing most likely have been normalized on white males, haven't been analyzed with a racial equity lens, or implemented in a way that trains users to recognize inherent racial bias.
- Center people with lived experience by having them at the table for analysis and decision making and pay them for their expertise. The people closest to the pain are often the people closest to the solution.

We tend to focus on data; however, in dismantling dominant white culture we also need to recognize that lived experience can often fill gaps that data cannot explain.

- Don't default to diversity. Plantations were diverse and we still had racism. The diversity of your Continuum of Care, board, staff, or working group will not alone overcome structural racism.
- Recognize it's not just the failure of other systems. While homelessness is often the symptom of other systems failing, we are not immune to structural racism and bias just because we have good people working to end homelessness.
- This "awakening" is just the first step in a long journey of addressing racial equity in housing and our homeless system. Without acknowledging the racial inequities that exist, and making a commitment to working woke to ensure that every action we make is racial equity focused and bringing us closer to fixing the broken system, we can never truly end homelessness.