

Resolution Supporting Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in the Professional Preparation and Development of the Health Education Workforce

Call for SOPHE to advocate for diversity, equity and inclusion in the settings in which health education specialists learn, teach, work, or conduct research so that they may contribute to a healthy and inclusive society.

**Adopted by the SOPHE Board of Trustees
December 13, 2023**

Whereas, SOPHE has adopted multiple resolutions underscoring the importance of health equity and diversity as critical elements of a just society so that all people in the varied communities in which they live can maximize their health (SOPHE, 2016, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c, 2021d); and

Whereas, the SOPHE Board of Trustees has accepted the findings and recommendations of the SOPHE Health Equity and Anti-racism Task Force (SOPHE, 2022); and

Whereas, the Code of Ethics for the Health Education Profession, which SOPHE has adopted, is grounded in fundamental ethical principles and guidelines for behavior (e.g., promoting justice; denouncing derogatory language, violence, bigotry, racism, harassment) and calls for health education specialists to be responsive to social, racial, faith-based, and cultural diversity in health education programming and research (CNHEO, 2020); and

Whereas, area VIII of the Health Education Specialist Practice Analysis II - 2020 includes the responsibility of health educators to “promote health equity” and “apply principles of cultural humility, inclusion, and diversity in all aspects of practice [e.g., Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) standards and culturally responsive pedagogy]”, as competencies for the entry- and advanced-level health education specialist (Knowlden et al., 2020); and

Whereas, to achieve the United States Department of Health and Human Services (n.d.) overarching goal of *Healthy People 2030* to “eliminate health disparities, achieve health equity, and attain health literacy to improve the health and well-being of all” requires health professionals’ understanding of fundamental concepts such as health equity, health disparities, social determinants of health (SDOH), structural racism, and systematic bias, as well as data tools and evidence-based interventions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d., para. 1); and

Whereas, Congress (United States Senate, 2023), SOPHE (2020), the American Public Health Association (2023), and other health-related organizations, and local jurisdictions have stated that racism is a public health crisis and must be addressed to reach health equity and to advocate for social justice; and

Whereas, President Biden (2021) signed Executive Order 14035 establishing a “Government-wide Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Strategic Plan” (p. 3) and many public health agencies (e.g., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2019), private organizations (e.g., Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2018), and the World Health Organization (2023) have provided recommendations for

organizational policies/practices, training for professionals, and/or resources to address DEI, health equity, SDOH, and social justice; and

Whereas, many states across the nation have introduced legislation and some have signed bills into law which would restrict the autonomy of public colleges and universities from funding DEI initiatives, diversity statements during hiring, the teaching of concepts such as bias on the basis of race or sex, or trainings around so-called “divisive topics” (Chronicle Staff, 2023); and

Whereas, the US Supreme Court’s decision in June 2023 to outlaw the consideration by public colleges and universities to include race as a sole category on student admissions is anticipated to impact future minority applications as well as other DEI-related policies and programs in higher education (College Board, 2023); and

Whereas, the Coalition of National Health Education Organizations (CNHEO), of which SOPHE is a member, put forth a strong statement supporting and demanding academic freedom in the education of future health educators, especially when it comes to issues of racism, systemic inequities, and other complex underlying issues that must be addressed to achieve the national goals of health equity (CNHEO, 2023); and

Whereas, research shows that a college climate that is supportive of diversity and equity, including campuses that have strong diversity statements in their mission statements and that show a strong commitment to institutional efforts to achieve equity, leads to better retention and persistence and higher emotional well-being for students (Travia et al., 2022; U.S. Department of Higher Education, 2016); and

Whereas, anti-DEI arguments have also spread to K-12 schools, as many lawmakers and school boards have introduced legislation and policies that ban so-called “critical race theory” and other curriculum choices, seek to remove or ban books, and call for teachers to be sanctioned or fired for talking about these concepts (Schwartz, 2021; Robinson, 2022; Young & Friedman, 2022); and

Whereas, the health education and public health workforce is experiencing high levels of retirement and large numbers of employees have left their positions at the state and local level (Leider et al., 2023) and that continuing efforts to recruit and train new public health students is necessary to respond to public health threats such as infectious diseases, reproductive health, the opioid epidemic, climate change and others; and

Whereas, students must be allowed to gain an understanding of history, policies, discrimination, and other social circumstances starting in early grades at an age-appropriate level, so that they can develop critical thinking skills throughout their education.

Therefore, be it resolved, SOPHE shall:

Internal Actions

1. Provide training and continuing education for health education specialists and other health professionals to learn about evidence-based programs and resources that support DEI, SDOH, and accessibility at SOPHE Annual Conferences, the Advocacy Summit, and other educational venues.
2. Educate SOPHE faculty and administrators about intentional and systematic efforts to support college/university autonomy in curriculum programs and other policies and programs related to DEI to help prepare a diverse, well trained health education workforce.
3. Expand and report tracking of DEI-related metrics in SOPHE's current and future strategic plans related to membership, journals, CE programs, and administration.
4. Continue to provide financial and staff support to SOPHE's Leaders in Equity, and Diversity Fellowship program to improve the diversity of future National and chapter SOPHE leaders as well as health educators serving in public/private agencies.
5. Disseminate this resolution to the partners including but not limited to CNHEO, the Association of Schools and Programs in Public Health, Historically Black Colleges and Universities, American Indian Tribally Controlled Colleges and Universities and Native American-Serving Nontribal Institutions, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian-Serving Institutions, Asian American and Native American Pacific Islander-Serving Institutions, National Center for Information and Technical Support for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities, Transitional & Postsecondary Programs for Students with Disabilities, and Hispanic serving institutions.

External Actions

1. Advocate for federal policies and legislation that protect college/universities' academic freedoms and students' access to credible education on the topics of racism, bias, systemic inequalities, history, and other concepts relevant to the SDOH.
2. Advocate for continued funding and support for Offices of Minority Health or Diversity in federal health agencies such as CDC, HRSA, and NIH.
3. Support federal legislation and funding that addresses student fellowships, internships or loan repayment programs for public health professionals, such as the National Health Service Corps and especially those targeted toward under-represented groups.
4. Collaborate with organizations such as the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health, National PTA, PEN America, and other groups protecting academic freedoms and supporting DEI initiatives.
5. Publicize opportunities for mentorship in DEI education to SOPHE members and potential members.

Suggested Reference:

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