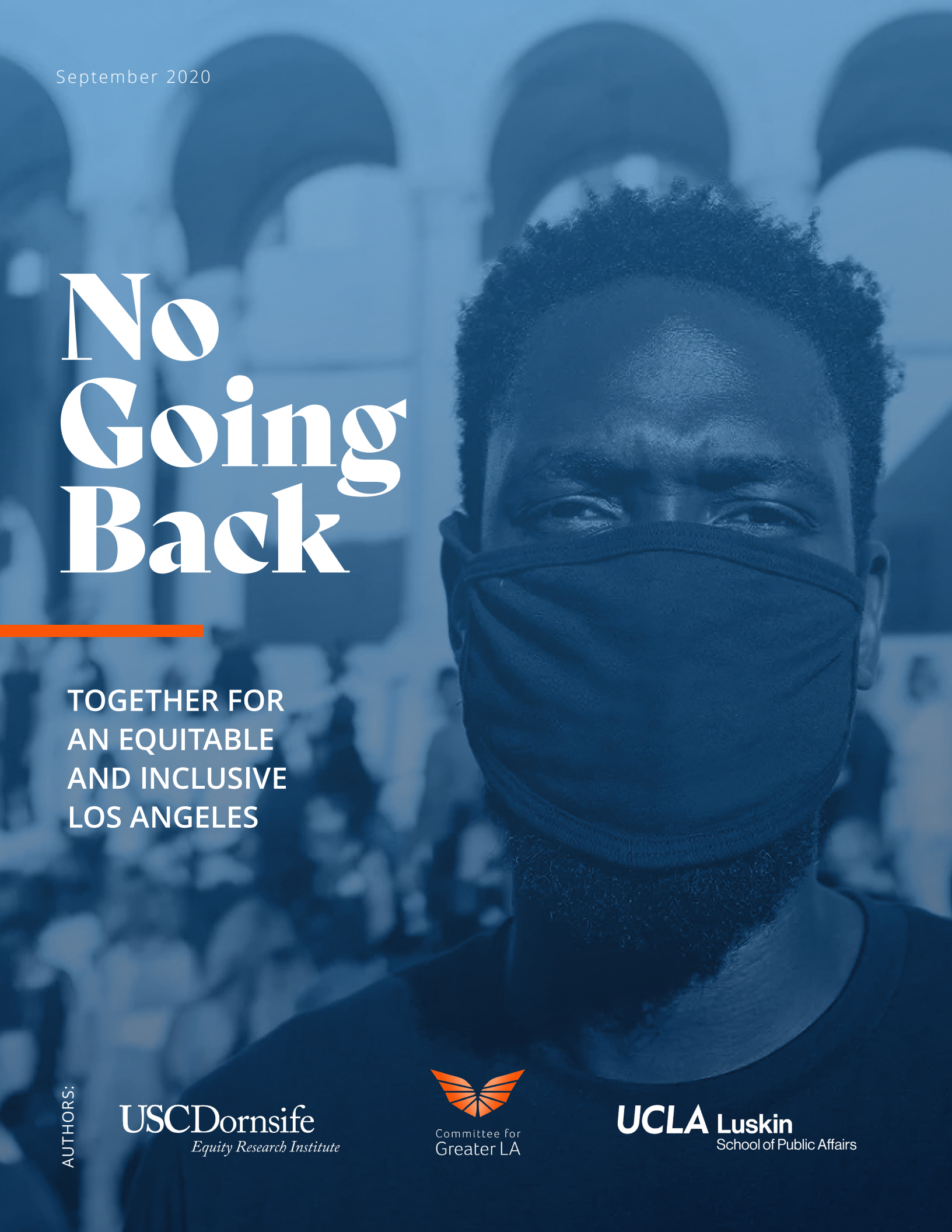

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No Going Back

TOGETHER FOR AN EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE LOS ANGELES

AUTHORS:

USC Dornsife Equity Research Institute

Committee for Greater LA

UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs

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Foreword

#NOGOINGBACKLA

Prior to the stay-at-home public health directive, civic boosters promoted Los Angeles as a metropolis that was confronting its problems and making progress. Local and state governments enjoyed budget surpluses, unprecedented investments were committed by Angelenos to respond to homelessness, and access to health care and high school graduation rates were at historically high levels, while unemployment and crime rates were at celebrated lows. But behind this glossy view of LA, a closer look at the data would have revealed a very different reality, where decades of structural and systemic racism resulted in significant social, economic, and racial inequality. Just a few months into a global pandemic, the cracks in the broken systems have become gaping holes, widening each day. Today, the calls for systemic change are loud, consequential, and urgent.

Early in the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, ten foundations wisely convened a diverse group of community, civic, non-profit, labor, and business leaders to identify the systemic issues emerging from the crisis and to offer up a blueprint for building a more equitable and inclusive LA. Their past philanthropic work had made it clear that Los Angeles was becoming increasingly inequitable, and they feared the acceleration of disparate impact centered on income and race. Thus, the Committee for Greater LA was formed, and for the past five months, it has steered the analytical work completed by two of LA's leading institutions, UCLA and USC, supported by a team of consultants. The report that follows reflects our discourse, analysis, and discovery.

Throughout this process we were often overwhelmed by the truth behind the data and were intentional in inviting diverse members of the community to share their lived experience. From immigrants to youth organizers, we listened to the stories, dreams, and fears of people who have been most impacted by this crisis, but more importantly, have been marginalized for decades. Through focus groups and panelists at our weekly 90-minute sessions, we listened to the voices behind the numbers. It was by far the most powerful part of this process. The youth voice gives our work meaning, purpose, and urgency. It is their voice that gives us hope. From young people, we heard a moral clarity that is the bedrock of our work ahead.

It is important to recognize the historic context from which this work emerges. Early in the pandemic, the Committee was briefed on the untold story of people of color disproportionately impacted by the coronavirus. From uneven federal economic relief efforts excluding families with mixed legal status, to rapidly increasing cases within communities of color in Los Angeles County, the Committee learned in real-time the consequences of decades of inequities. The Advancement Project sounded the alarm about the growing number of cases, hospitalizations, and deaths projected to occur in more dense and poorer zip codes in Los Angeles County. As the economy reopened and essential workers were called back to work, disparate impact grew exponentially, while wealthier communities maintained the privilege of working from home. Schools struggled to support students in a virtual environment, and the consequences of learning loss on low-income Black, Indigenous, Latino, and other students of color were devastating. Not surprisingly, the pandemic began to reveal the two Los Angeles Counties that have existed underneath us all along.

The public outrage over the execution of George Floyd added greater urgency to our work and called for a focus on the legacy of injustices against the Black community. The overrepresentation of African Americans who are incarcerated or among the homeless population is a result of anti-Black racist systems. Our work focuses on this issue and calls for a proactive agenda that explicitly dismantles anti-Black racism and an independent study on the state of African Americans in Los Angeles County.

Our collective work is not a report to be shelved but a mandate for action that is intended to endorse, amplify, and support the ongoing work of an emerging movement of advocates, young people, community-based, and civic leaders calling for systemic change. Our mantra is our purpose: NO GOING BACK LA!

Where do we go from here? LA before COVID-19 was not a place to celebrate or revere. What we learned, and what the data and analysis clearly shows, is that our region was built on structures designed to maintain the privileged by intentionally excluding and marginalizing others. Real and necessary change is often blocked by holders of the status quo unable or unwilling to listen and respond to the people and communities most impacted by the very systems they maintain. Going back to the Los Angeles of the past is not progress. We propose dismantling those structures and prioritizing how resources will be directed in order to achieve a more accountable Los Angeles driven by outcomes centered on racial equity. This work should not be limited to the issues raised in this report, for there are many others that call for systems change. Such issues include police

reform and the dismantling of the school to prison pipeline, and achieving greater equity for women, LGBTQ+ communities, people with disabilities, and Native American communities.

We are committed to continuing the work of the Committee and being part of the movement for change as agitators, disruptors, and truth-tellers. We invite a broad coalition of leaders, activists, residents, academics, practitioners and experts who are outraged by the region's inequalities and seek to drive data-driven systemic change. While we now have a road map in hand, how we get there matters. We will lead with values that reflect our desired outcomes by placing our commitment to racial equity and inclusion at the center of our work and collective agenda. We will hold ourselves and those in positions of authority accountable to systemic change by asking: What is our part? We will further engage cross-sector perspectives, knowing that while we may not always agree, we will always maintain a safe environment for shared learning, research, support, and advocacy. We will respect communities and community engagement by amplifying the voices and work of those with lived experience – as only they can tell us when real progress is achieved. We will adapt our role as needed to move an issue forward, supporting others in their work and leading at the forefront when it is called upon. We will not give up, knowing that this work is hard, long-term, and with no easy answers or one-off fixes.

#NOGOINGBACKLA is not just a hashtag, it is a promise. The late Congressman John Lewis urged us to say something, to do something when we see something that is not right. The future work of the Committee will do just that. The release of this work is a milestone on the journey to a more inclusive and equitable Los Angeles.

We would like to thank Dr. Gary Segura, Dean of the UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs and Dr. Manuel Pastor, Director of the USC Equity Research Institute for their patience and brilliance. Their insights and stewardship were central to the work of the committee. They were supported by Rhonda Ortiz, Edward-Michael Muña, and many other faculty, staff, and students at USC and UCLA. The urgency to bring attention to the disparate impacts of COVID-19 was a result of the work of the capable team at The Advancement Project, led by John Kim, Co-Director. We also acknowledge the work of the Bold Vision 2028 initiative that guided our work on youth. In addition, the Nonprofit Finance Fund provided valuable information and insight on the challenges faced by the non-profit sector.

Our work was carefully facilitated by Robin Engel, Founder and President of

Star Insights, and enriched by the contributions of a dynamic team including Cielo Castro, Neel Garlapati, Karlo Marcelo, and Kamina Smith. We were able to communicate our work with the broader community thanks to the expertise of Patricia Pérez, CEO of VPE Tradigital Communications and Marie Condron, Josh Kamensky and their team at Ocean & Mountain. Photographer Kemal Cilengir captured life in Los Angeles in 2020 with his powerful images. Chris Essel, President and CEO at Southern California Grantmakers and her team were essential in keeping us connected with funders and providing backbone support.

We would like to thank the funders of this initiative for the foresight to bring together a diverse group of Angelenos to develop an ambitious but essential blueprint for a more equitable and diverse LA. Our funders are: Annenberg Foundation, Ballmer Group, The Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, California Community Foundation, The California Endowment, The California Wellness Foundation, Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, The John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation, The Smidt Foundation and Weingart Foundation. Thank you.

Our work was driven by the voices of scores of Angelenos, community activists, and young people who not only shared their voice, but challenged us to be bold in our recommendations and to continue with our work after the release of the report. We want to thank them for their participation and for their work in building a greater LA.

Thank you for joining us in this effort,

Miguel A. Santana
Chair, Committee for Greater LA

Fred Ali
President and CEO, Weingart Foundation

Raul A. Anaya
President, Greater Los Angeles Bank of America

Charisse Bremond Weaver
President and CEO, Brotherhood Crusade

Cynthia Buiza
Executive Director, California Immigrant Policy Center

Lian Cheun
Executive Director, Khmer Girls in Action

Debra Duardo
Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools

Sarah Dusseault
Immediate Past Chair, Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority Commission

Anna Hovasapian
Legislative Director, L.A. Council President Nury Martinez

Gita Murthy
CEO, Gita Murthy Consulting

Matt Szabo
Deputy Chief of Staff, L.A. Mayor Eric Garcetti

Judith Vasquez
Senior Advisor, L.A. County Supervisor Hilda L. Solis

April Verrett
President, SEIU Local 2015

Jacqueline Waggoner
VP and Southern CA Market Leader, Enterprise Community Partners

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge that the area now called Los Angeles County is on the traditional homelands of the Chumash, Tataviam, Serrano, Cahuilla, Juaneño, and Luiseño People and Tongva people. We pay our respects to the traditional caretakers of the land, the Tongva Nation, their ancestors, elders, and relations past, present, and forthcoming.

This report encourages everyone to consider the many impacts—past and present— of colonization, genocide, slavery, violence, displacement, migration, and settlement that bring us here today. Native people continue to reside in and around what we now call Los Angeles County—the county that is currently home to the largest population of Native people in the United States. We recognize this land acknowledgment is limited, and requires us to engage in an ongoing process of learning and accountability.

For more information on and resources on Native American/indigenous organizing please visit the California Native Vote Project, the Los Angeles City/ County Native American Commission, Sacred Places Institute for Indigenous Peoples, UCLA American Indian Studies Center, and United American Indian Involvement.

Acknowledgements

This is one of two reports that are a product of the Committee for Greater LA. The Committee for Greater LA is a collaboration of local governments in Los Angeles including Los Angeles County, the City of Los Angeles, and others along with the help and support of philanthropy, and input and guidance of community based organizations. All these different organizations, sectors, and government agencies are deeply involved in recovery efforts from COVID-19 and some are also involved in immediate, emergency relief efforts. The Committee's charge is to help ease the burden of those essential workers who are in the trenches fighting to save lives from the pandemic and to help provide a roadmap for an equitable and inclusive recovery once the pandemic is over.

The two reports we offer are a starting contribution by the Committee and they lay the foundation for future committee action and advocacy for a more equitable future after COVID-19. The researchers that put together these reports are based mostly at the Luskin School for Public Policy at the University of California Los Angeles and the Equity Research Institute at the University of Southern California. Both institutions would like to thank each and every committee member who volunteered countless hours to contribute to the entire endeavor, as well as provide guidance, writing, and feedback for these reports. Thank you to Ashley K Thomas and Joanna Lee for their feedback and guidance. The design of this project was completed by Julianna Beckert with coordination from Sabrina Kim.

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Lead Authors/ Researchers

Manuel Pastor
Director, USC Equity Research Institute
Gary Segura
Dean, UCLA Luskin School of Public Affairs

Contributing Authors

Sarah Balcha, USC
Elaine Batchlor, M.L.K. Jr. Community Hospital
Eraka Bath, UCLA
Isaac Bryan, UCLA
Vanessa Carter, USC
Debra Duardo, LACOE
Sarah Dusseault, LAHSA
Antonio Elizondo, UCLA
Dan Flynn, UCLA
Jeffer Giang, USC
Dalia Gonzalez, USC
Chris Hoene, CBPC
John Kim, Advancement Project
Michael Lens, UCLA
Patricia Lester, UCLA
Kelly Lytle Hernandez, UCLA
Thai Le, USC
Paavo Makkonnen, UCLA
Michael Manville, UCLA
Edward-Michael Muña, USC
Gita Murthy, Gita Murthy Consulting
Pedro Noguera, USC
Paul Ong, UCLA
Rhonda Ortiz, USC
Gary Painter, USC
Meredith Phillips, UCLA
Blanca Ramirez, USC
Ananya Roy, UCLA
Mariesa Samba, UCLA
Lucrecia Santibañez, UCLA
Ellen Schwartz, UCLA
Justin Scoggins, USC
Jonathan Sherin, LADMH
Veronica Terriquez, UC Santa Cruz
Jacqueline Waggoner, Enterprise
Emma Yudelevitch, USC

Steering Committee Members

Miguel Santana, Chair, Committee for Greater LA
Fred Ali, President and CEO, Weingart Foundation
Raul A. Anaya, President, Greater Los Angeles Bank of America
Monica Banken, Deputy, LA County Supervisor Kathryn Barger
Charisse Bremond Weaver, President and CEO, Brotherhood Crusade
Cynthia Buiza, Executive Director, California Immigrant Policy Center
Lian Cheun, Executive Director, Khmer Girls in Action
Debra Duardo, Los Angeles County Superintendent of Schools
Sarah Dusseault, Immediate Past Board Chair, Los Angele Homeless Services Authority Commission
Anna Hovasapian, Legislative Director, LA Council President Nury Martinez
Gita Murthy, CEO, Gita Murthy Consulting
Matt Szabo, Deputy Chief of Staff, LA Mayor Eric Garcetti
Judith Vasquez, Senior Advisor, LA County Supervisor Hilda L. Solis
April Verrett, President, SEIU Local 2015
Jacqueline Waggoner, VP and Southern CA Market Leader, Enterprise Community Partners

Consultants

Cielo Castro, Star Insights
Robin Engel, Star Insights
Neel Garlapati, Octopod Solutions
Karlo Marcelo, Star Insights
Kamina Smith, Star Insights

Executive Summary

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, families across Los Angeles County have endured multiple waves of sickness, insecurity, joblessness, learning loss, and challenges to mental health. These impacts have been felt across Angelenos of all spectrums including communities of color: Black Angelenos, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as well as women, LGBTQIA communities, the young, seniors, and people with disabilities. As of late August, the County was reporting over 225,000 cases and nearly 5,500 deaths, with the case and death rates sharply up in Black, Latino, Native American, and Pacific Islander communities as seen later in this report. These are even possibly more alarming as race/ethnicity data is still not identified for many cases. Economic costs have been uneven as well, with the state reporting that nearly half of Black workers have filed for unemployment since the crisis began through the end of July, well above the twenty-seven percent figure for white workers.

Meanwhile, undocumented Angelenos – 70 percent of whom have been in the United States for a decade or longer – have been largely frozen out of relief. With them and their immediate family members comprising roughly 18 percent of the County, this has been a recipe for regional economic disaster. Add to that the stresses of making rent, the learning loss suffered by Black, Latino, and Native American kids on the wrong side of the digital divide, the physical and mental trauma visited on communities by the pandemic, and a lack of health care, and you have a recipe for deepening distress and inequality.

Yet this pattern of pain should have been expected: In many ways, COVID-19 is the disease that has revealed our social illnesses of anti-Black racism, precarious employment, sharp racial gaps in wealth and digital access, unaffordable housing, growing homelessness, unresponsive government, and so much more. Communities shattered, health battered, and businesses shuttered – these are the real costs of the crisis. But these outcomes are not the result of bad luck and misfortune; rather than a bug in the system, they are a feature in which structural racism has long set the fortunes and limited the potential of communities of color, particularly Black and Indigenous people.

The role of racism in our country has been driven home by the most recent rash of murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Elijah McClain, Rayshard Brooks, Anthony McClain, Dijon Kizzee, and so many others. But with that has come a deeper realization: Police brutality is just the tip of a racist iceberg that extends to systems of education, the economy, and health care. Public consciousness has shifted. Many Americans are coming to understand that confronting anti-Black racism is key *and* that the same forces that marginalize Black people also blame Asian Americans for COVID-19 and refuse to extend full support to immigrants.

As a result, we cannot think of the task ahead for Los Angeles as recovery from COVID-19. We cannot go back to an old "normal" that has failed so many. There is no return to a system that over-policed, over-incarcerated, and under-delivered. We should have no nostalgia for an economy that did not reward truly essential workers such as agricultural laborers, grocery store clerks, truck drivers, elder care specialists, and others. We should hold no affection for a system that has long stripped assets from communities through stolen land from Native Americans, discrimination, and redlining, rather than built them up through public and private investment.

This is not the first time Los Angeles has weathered an economic shock or been forced to face its own systemic racism. The Watts Rebellion of 1965 and the Uprisings in 1992 were both sparked by acts of police brutality and signaled the need to reckon with entrenched disparities and anti-Black racism. In both instances, reports were written and plans were launched to deal with the under-investment that gave rise to unrest—but little fundamentally changed, particularly for Black Angelenos. So what might be different this time?

Three factors may make a difference. The first is simply the profundity of the moment: In the midst of a pandemic, protests against anti-Blackness were held in all 50 states and the national dialogue on race shifted, with some saying this has been the most widespread awareness of systemic racism since the Civil Rights movement. A second is the growing recognition – by the public, policy makers, and business leaders – that the current levels of inequality and racial disparity threaten public health in the short-run and prosperity in the long-run. A final factor is the depth and expertise of the community-based organizations that can propel a seismic change for the better in Los Angeles. Indeed, they have already helped make what was once unthinkable – restraining police spending, emptying our jails, delivering aid regardless of status – part of a new status quo.

To make a better Los Angeles, we must center racial equity, align systems and hold them accountable for more effective delivery, and stir a new civic conversation and commitment for change. In the accompanying policy report, we note how to do these three things across a wide variety of issues. Here, we emphasize ten important principles for a reinvention of Los Angeles:

Ten Important Principles for a Reinvention of Los Angeles

1

Address anti-Black racism in all its forms.

Statistic after statistic on homelessness, education, family wealth, health and well-being, and the criminal justice system show ample evidence of the systemic racism impacting Black Angelenos. Leaders must be committed to understanding the history that has produced these outcomes and devoted to making progress on an anti-racist agenda.

2

Build an economy that prioritizes those who have been left or kept behind.

Business can be a force for good in this arena, particularly by shifting hiring practices and opening up procurement systems to businesses owned by people of color. But there is also a need to protect workers, promote a "caring economy," address long-standing racial disparities in labor markets, overcome discrimination against people with disabilities, and ensure affordable digital access for all.

3

Support the health of communities and individuals living with the trauma of systemic neglect and oppression.

This requires a combination of community-based care and attention to insuring sufficient reimbursement for providers serving the least advantaged. Everyone should be able to connect to health and mental health services, regardless of status. And mental health systems should promote healing and also empower communities to press for change in the systems that cause hurt.

4

Create housing for all and end unsheltered homelessness.

Black people represent eight percent of the County population but a full third of those who are homeless, while the share of Native Americans who are experiencing homelessness is roughly five-fold their share of the County. The COVID-19 crisis has worsened already existing housing insecurity, with many an eviction away from the streets. Change will require that the scale of the response reflect the scale of the crisis, that we tackle the legacies and realities of structural racism, and that the region as a whole take action and hold these structures accountable.

5

Ensure access, mobility, and voice for immigrants regardless of status.

We need disaster relief that can get to all Angelenos, we need a right to work which does not depend on documentation, and we need small business promotion that includes firms owned by Black, Indigenous, and immigrant entrepreneurs. Political systems should open to include local voting by non-citizens and we need an aggressive campaign to naturalize all who are eligible.

6

Support education access for all children and all communities.

In the current situation, this means closing the digital divide, securing remote access for all families, and taking special steps to address the learning loss that has occurred in this period of disconnection. More broadly, we need an equity-oriented and anti-racist student performance framework that addresses community-based disparities.

7

Celebrate and support youth leadership and empowerment.

Youth who have intersectional identities of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity experience discriminatory disciplinary responses in education, child welfare, and juvenile justice. Changing this will require investments in youth leadership to challenge systems as well as training to ensure employment and entrepreneurship.

8

Strengthen the non-profit sector as a key part of civil society.

Local philanthropy has stepped in to provide emergency support for non-profits who provide services and promote leadership but this cannot be a one-time infusion. Ensuring resources, harmonizing application and reporting requirements, providing multi-year funding, and supporting less visible sectors, like organizations supporting Native Americans, will all be critical.

9

Build community power and develop accompanying metrics to hold systems accountable.

Those who are closest to the problem are closest to the solution – but they are often furthest from the power needed to impact public policy. We need to support youth and community organizing, develop and deploy accurate and inclusive metrics that can measure progress on racial equity, and hold systems accountable to performance not promises.

10

Align business, community, philanthropy, and government for equity.

Justice is everyone's business and we need more effective and integrated governance structures, data, and information sharing across systems. But we also need a new sense of public will that what was once deemed politically unfeasible – reducing police budgets, achieving digital equality, and investing fully in education – is now imperative.

TOGETHER FOR AN EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE LOS ANGELES

COVID-19 continues to ravage the nation and the state, with pain and death ripping through communities with the fewest protections. Recovery will be slow, pain will be persistent, and, unless addressed, income inequality may grow. Yet there is also an extraordinary opening as residents and leaders recognize the pandemic's wake-up call: that our failure to act in solidarity with one another – to value Black lives, to treasure immigrant families, to declare homelessness unacceptable, to be willing to shoulder the burdens of mutual support – has left our whole region far more vulnerable than necessary.

This moment begs of us to create something better. We can prioritize Black wellbeing, we can support immigrant inclusion, and we can highlight the needs of groups like Pacific Islanders, Native Americans, and people with disabilities – all of which are so often invisibilized. We can make work pay a living wage, we can help entrepreneurs build wealth, and we can find new solutions to housing. We can redefine community safety, make schools hubs of learning and connection, and support youth and community organizing.

To do all this, the region, the state, and the nation will need to have a frank discussion about how to raise revenues, drive dollars to more effectively address needs, and forge a new civic commitment to equity and accountability. The time is now. We cannot go back to a past that never really worked; we must move forward together for an equitable and inclusive Los Angeles.

Introduction

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, families across Los Angeles County have endured multiple waves of sickness, insecurity, joblessness, learning loss, and challenges to mental health. As of late August, the County was reporting over 225,000 cases and nearly 5,500 deaths. The impacts of the disease have been distinctly uneven by race and ethnicity: as of that same date, age-adjusted case rates were about 30 percent higher for Black Angelenos than for white Angelenos, 47 percent higher for Native Americans, nearly 200 percent higher for Latinos, and a startling 470 percent higher for Pacific Islanders. Likewise, the likelihood of contracting the disease has been more than twice as high in high-poverty neighborhoods as in low-poverty neighborhoods.[1]

Yet even these stark numbers and sharp disparities do not capture the stress and anxiety that have wracked the region, particularly its communities of color. School closures forced roughly 1.5 million students to go online – often without internet access at home – and made parents become teachers overnight. Businesses boarded up, with small establishments owned by people of color most deeply impacted, even as many low-wage workers of color lost their jobs in firms large and small. Some of the newly unemployed lost their housing and were forced to move-in with relatives or become homeless.[2]

Other workers have been deemed "essential," a designation that shielded a share of their income but created health risks to themselves and family members. And if Angelenos get sick, their access to health insurance varies sharply by race; despite the state's commitment to a fully covered California, ten percent of African American adults, twenty two percent of Latinos, eleven percent of Pacific Islanders, and fifteen percent of Native Americans lack any kind of health insurance in the County, as compared to only five percent of white Angelenos. Financial and other pressures have become the norm for many, with isolation and depression reinforced by a lack of physical contact with relatives or friends.

Take Eduardo and his family.[3] Rebuilding his life after a period of incarceration, Eduardo was taking a full course load and working at a local library when COVID-19 hit. Finances were strained when both his wife and mother lost their jobs cleaning homes for Airbnb. He is now picking up spare work and selling his possessions to try to supplement his family's income. As one of the only people in his household of 11 comfortable with technology, he's trying to keep his daughter's education afloat but, "there's only so much you can do, you know, they're missing out on their education and on being themselves." And even as he struggles to make it, he finds himself racially profiled by the police and terrified of the consequences of a bad encounter: "a cop [was] just following me. . . And I literally had to open my window so he could see that it's me and my daughter. And . . . he just looked at my car and then took off."

Lives shattered, health battered, businesses shuttered, and communities stressed – these are the real costs of the crisis. But these indicators of distress are not the result of bad luck and misfortune; they have been manufactured through the ways in which structural and systemic racism has played out across joblessness, homelessness, income inequality, mass incarceration, insecurity caused by a lack of legal

status, and so many other arenas of daily life. And so while COVID-19 is a threat, it is also a wake-up call: the disease has revealed our fundamental ills and inequalities as a society. Communities of color have been traumatized by our systems for some time, but now most everyone in Los Angeles knows the feeling of trauma themselves and many are more acutely aware of the trauma of others, particularly that induced by deep-rooted structural racism.

Adding to this awakening about our social reality have been the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Elijah McClain, Rayshard Brooks, Anthony McClain, Dijon Kizzee, and so many others. Widespread protests against not just police brutality, but persistent anti-Black racism that is deeply entrenched in our institutions, systems, and attitudes, have strengthened movements, nationally and locally, to interrupt anti-Blackness. Race and racism have become topics of conversation in a way unseen since the civil rights era.[4] In LA, this has led to moments of reckoning with our past, present, and future, including challenges to excessive spending on police, sheriffs, and jails, and calls for a new vision of public safety.

> ***"And my 10 year old nephew, he's half Japanese, half Filipino. He's going to be starting sixth grade next year and he's going to a new school and we're like, you know, what's the biggest worry? And my sister's, you know what, and he told me his biggest worry is he feels he's going to be blamed for creating the coronavirus. And I'm like, what the [heck]? . . . like that's his biggest worry going into sixth grade? . . . And I'm like literally scared for him . . . but I think it's very much real.***
>
> ***– Focus Group Participant***

And while the state-sponsored violence against Black bodies has been the prompt for rebellion, it has also become clear that the systems of white supremacy now being challenged on the street, in workplaces, and decision-making circles set the table of disadvantage for all Americans. A society that tries to downplay the impacts of slavery, Jim Crow, and redlining is also a society that finds it easy to forget

the genocide of Native Americans and the ways in which land, labor, and skills were stolen from Native communities. A society that systematically disenfranchises Black people has set a racialized terrain onto which immigrants are "othered," the plight of long-settled but currently undocumented Angelenos can be ignored, and hate crimes against Asian Americans can rise as an odious response to a pandemic.[5]

This moment begs of us to create something better, together. We can prioritize Black wellbeing, we can support immigrant inclusion, we can make work pay a living wage, we can find new solutions to housing, we can redefine community safety, and more. And the reasons to do this involve both justice and our mutual survival: the region's future depends on our ability to secure the wellbeing of those communities hit the hardest. As long as our essential workers – who are primarily Black and Latino – struggle to secure their families' health and finances, so too will the region. Our supply chains will remain fragile, our children's education will remain in question, and our ability to slow the spread will remain uncertain.

We will only get through this crisis if we recognize that our future depends on each other. Protecting our own collective health – and restoring the health of our regional economy – is only possible if we tackle the fragilities, impediments, and disadvantages that have rendered so many vulnerable. While some have framed the task ahead as recovery, there is no going back to a "normal" that did not work for many Angelenos. Instead, we need to reimagine and reinvent a new Los Angeles in which everyone can thrive.

Toward a Greater Los Angeles

Recognizing that it is time to center racial equity, to align systems to promote inclusion, and to stir a broader civic conversation about our common fate, a collaborative of Southern California foundations came together to request that researchers from USC and UCLA work together to produce a report on where the region should go post-COVID-19. To steer the process, an advisory group was formed, including representatives from business, labor, non-profits, and public agencies, that has come to be called the Committee for Greater LA.

In our meetings, we shared data on the impact of the pandemic, considered the broader history and context of racial inequality, and learned about specific policy flaws and fixes—but most important was that we heard from those most affected. The stories included a formerly unhoused Angeleno describing the challenges that greeted her and the programs that assisted her, a young Black advocate describing the hostility he faced at a local college and his efforts to come into his own power, and a vibrant young leader describing her efforts to combat mental illness and find solace and meaning in organizing for change. Because of their bravery at sharing, those in the Committee were schooled in what data cannot fully capture: the ways in which lives are thwarted or supported by systems and beliefs.

The combination of research and *testimonio* created a sense of urgency about the need to take advantage of this moment as a potential opening for racial and social justice. And while our recommendations touch a range of different issue areas, including economic development, housing, health, and youth development, our overall work has been guided by three central themes.

> ***. . . when the Coronavirus hit, first of all, I got the Coronavirus. So, that was really, really horrible. I passed it on to my mom's boyfriend, passed it onto my mom and passed it onto my dad. My dad just turned 72. My mom about to turn 62, they were sick for almost three months. My mom's bronchitis flared up. I couldn't move from the couch. I couldn't eat, I couldn't do anything. And I refused to go to the hospital because I couldn't figure out what was wrong with me. So, I made it through that. My parents made it through that. That just really set the tone for this whole quarantine for me. I take it very seriously. I don't mind not seeing my friends or my family, because I want to see them for many years to come.***
>
> ***– Focus Group Participant***

The first is that recovery, reimagination, and reinvention must center equity, particularly racial equity. The disparate pattern of illness and death that has stalked Los Angeles in this pandemic is not a bug of the system but a feature. Decades of redlining, asset-stripping, and over-incarceration left Black Angelenos with less cushion against an economic blow. Years of treating Asian Americans as a permanent "other" has left that group at the mercies

of hate stirred by opportunistic national leaders. And the consistent failure to grant immigrants permanence in what is now their county has left many Latino, Asian American and Pacific Islander, and other mixed-status families frozen out of relief programs and fearful of contact with authorities.

Facing this reality is key. It means understanding the past, promoting full participation in policy-making in the present, and creating systems change that can avoid negative consequences in the future. We need economic development that invests and roots in communities, rather than displaces them. We need support systems that address trauma and value all individuals and families. And we need leaders that are committed to staring directly at our racist structures, admitting the problems they have caused, and doubling down to create a playing field of opportunity rather than a terrain of despair.

The second guiding theme is that we need to align systems for change. The pandemic is affecting communities in complex, interwoven, and quickly changing ways. Surges in case numbers have forced swift change with long-lasting impacts – when schools and businesses close, lives and livelihoods are dramatically altered. If we are expecting our institutions operating for child and family welfare, immigration, health, transportation, and education to produce anything that adequately meets the needs of the moment or our future, they need to work in concert and with the creativity that this moment demands – and that should be the hallmark of good governance, anyway.

Equally important: system leaders need to be listening to those directly affected by their programs and policies. Institutions that find themselves out of step with businesses, workers, families, and communities will not only implement incorrectly, they will potentially exacerbate suffering and limit their own potential and even survival. Because of this, we think that a crucial element of any true recovery involves expanding community power and voice, particularly of young Angelenos, and fully funding the non-profit sector and community-based organizations that can rebalance our concerns in the direction of social justice.

Finally, we need a new civic commitment about how to better care for each other. Our current environment has created an "every family for themselves" society in which those with resources have the ability to adapt, to embrace remote work and remote learning, and to try to protect their children's education with nannies or independent "learning pods" while other school kids find themselves on the wrong side of the digital divide and slipping academically every day. COVID-19 may call for short-term "social distancing" but we can no longer afford the long-term disconnection that has allowed homeless numbers to go up, jobs to disappear, and our region's children to be systematically short-changed.

> ***I am from a big family and we are used to getting together every weekend, eating, talking and we talk to my parents during the week . . . And, now we can't. We can't do anything. At first, [my kids] didn't understand what was going on and then 13 people in our family got sick with COVID-19, including me. This illness is nothing like anything else. I don't wish it on anyone. The first three days, I felt like I was going to die, especially at night. I felt a warmth in my body that I can't explain and my throat was very dry and then I got the chills and a high fever and body aches that were really incredible. I felt desperate and asked God for help. I was like that one day after another and then I was in quarantine for almost a month. And, the sad part was that my dad and mom both got sick and no one could go visit them. Thank God, we were able to get through it and I give thanks to God. I am better, but I still feel afraid to go out.***
>
> ***– Focus Group Participant***

Defeating this pandemic and getting the region on more solid footing requires that we put workers' lives in front of our desire to go to bars, seek out entertainment, and receive services. It requires that we set universal standards for quality education, align resources to achieve those goals, and hold systems accountable for meeting outcomes of

student engagement and learning. And it requires that we adopt government actions that place the health and safety of everyone at the center of decision making and work to achieve the universal financial support that can make this a reality.

The Committee for Greater LA has tried to lift up this vision of connecting and committing to a better future for our region. This report seeks to lay out the context of inequality on which COVID-19 has wreaked its havoc, the problems that have been both exacerbated and illustrated by the crisis, and the measures we should undertake to build a better region through ten principles for a more racially just and sustainable future. The accompanying policy report, *No Going Back: Policies for an Equitable and Inclusive Los Angeles*, offers great detail on those measures by each issue area.

We see the two reports as an initial step in a process. With the constraints of time and resources, we were not able to cover all of the challenges that will face us going forward – and we know that more will come up along the way. We also know that there are other efforts to improve our region and discussions about viable economic alternatives. We simply hope that what we say here intersects effectively with those other strategic discussions and leads to the sort of civic vision we desperately need – one that commits leaders and communities to working together across sectors for an equitable and inclusive Los Angeles.

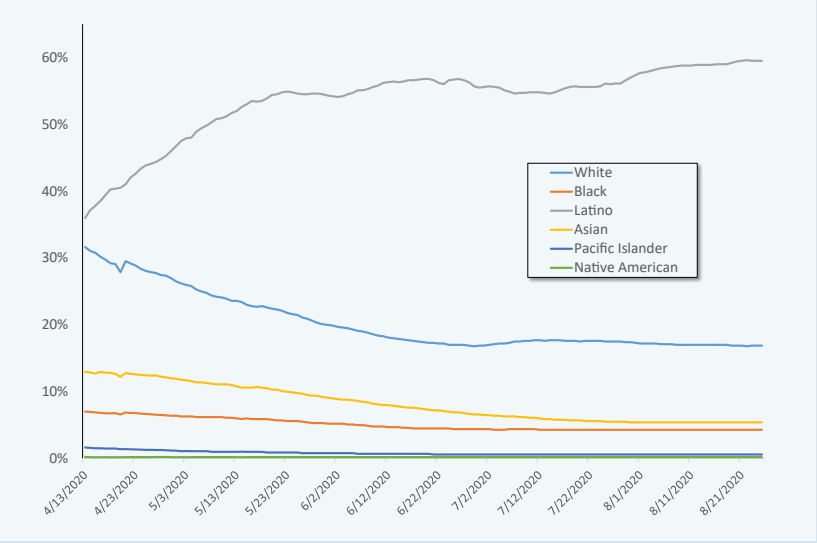
> ***I think as a whole, the system is just broken. I mean, how can people that work full time jobs still be paycheck to paycheck. I still have a hard time with that. I think about when my dad first came and was able to buy a little house and he was just a cook and my mom was a seamstress and I work with a bunch of professionals who can't even afford to live near the school. All that, I feel, breaks the community … I mean, I look at the stock market and it's so disconnected to what was really happening. And it keeps going up, up, up, up, up, and people are paycheck to paycheck. You know, I look around at a lot of people that I know that do have degrees. And sometimes I feel like you tell people, "if you work hard, you'll be successful." That's not really true.***
>
> ***– Focus Group Participant***

COVID in our Community

When COVID-19 first struck Los Angeles, its first impacts were initially felt in wealthier, whiter communities, presumably because some of the early cases resulted from international travelers and/or because these communities had better and early access to testing and health care. The Advancement Project has shown that the geography of infection changed as time went on, with cases upticking in lower-income areas of color, particularly in South LA, East LA, and the Southeast cities that comprise the Alameda Corridor.[6] This case shift is consistent with statewide trends seen in Figure 1; as time has gone on, Latinos are now carrying the greatest weight of infections, unsurprising as the disease has made its way to younger working populations.[7]

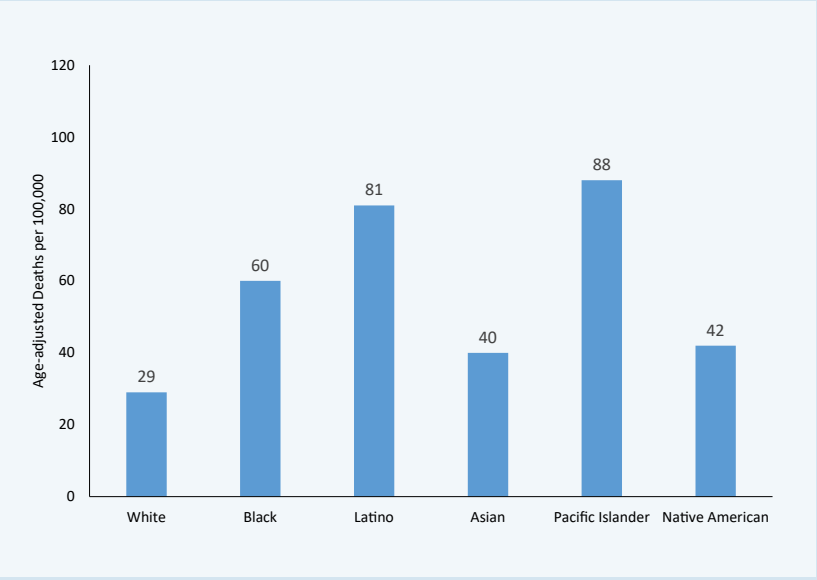
The death pattern from COVID-19 is sharply racialized as well. In Figure 2, we look at the age-adjusted death rates per 100,000: by that measure, the death count for Native Americans is about 1.5 times that of whites, while it is 2 times as high for African Americans, 2.8 times for Latinos, and 3 times for Pacific Islanders.[8] The striking gaps have led to a search for explanations, with some pointing to the lack of health insurance and the existence of co-morbidities, particularly for African Americans and Latinos, such as diabetes, hypertension, obesity, and lung disease. Others have noted the role of those factors as well as the prevalence of multi-generational homes and a significant presence in the "essential" workforce on the part of Pacific Islanders.[9] But those various social determinants of health are themselves related to living and working conditions – in terms of low incomes, food quality, park access, air quality, overcrowded housing, and job characteristics – that reflect pre-existing patterns of structural racism.[10]

FIGURE 1. SHIFTING SHARE OF CUMULATIVE CASES BY RACE/ETHNICITY IN CALIFORNIA, APRIL 13-AUGUST 25, 2020



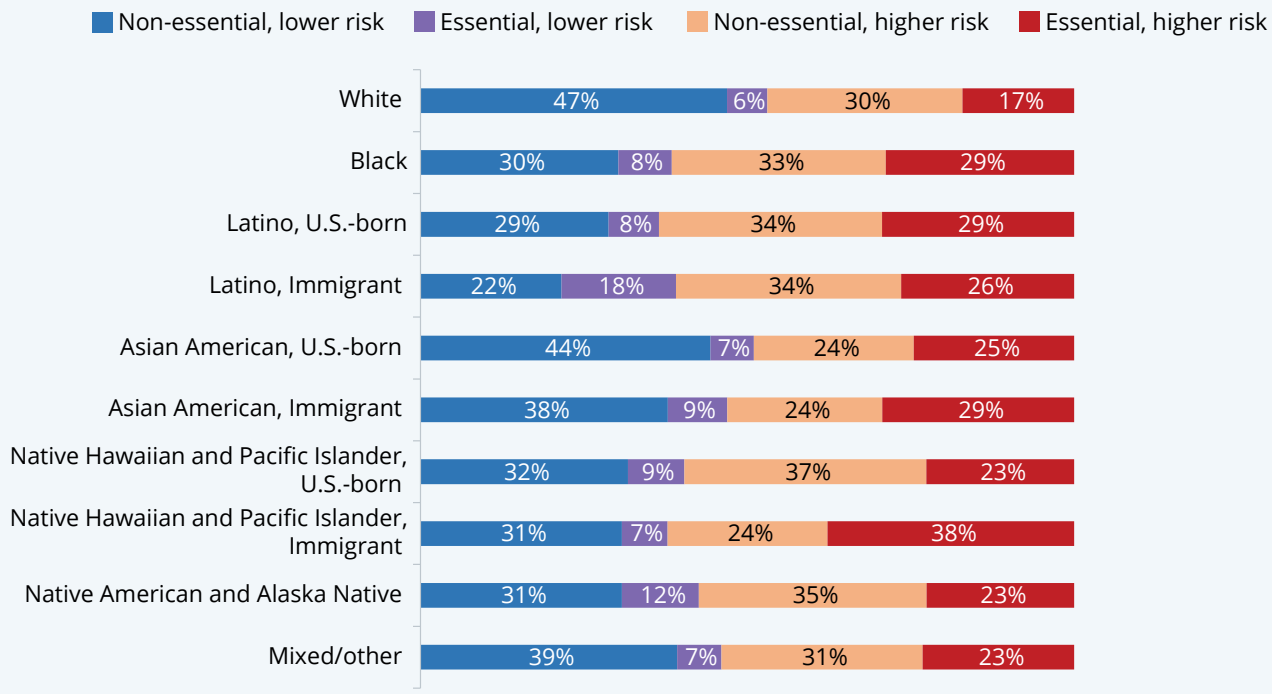
Source: California Department of Public Health. California COVID-19 Assessment Tool. Located at: https://covid19.ca.gov/data-and-tools/. Note: Data cover all cases for which race/ethnicity is identified (about two-thirds of all cases).

FIGURE 2: AGE-ADJUSTED COVID-19 DEATH RATES, LOS ANGELES COUNTY, AUGUST 29, 2020



Source: Los Angeles Department of Public Health. Data on age-adjusted disparities as of August 29, 2020. Located at: http://dashboard.publichealth.lacounty.gov/covid19_surveillance_dashboard/. Note: Age-adjustments are necessary for cross-group comparison because of higher vulnerabilities for the elderly and differences in the age distribution for different ethnic groups.

FIGURE 3: WORKERS BY RACE/ETHNICITY/NATIVITY, EMPLOYMENT IN ESSENTIAL OCCUPATIONS AND OCCUPATIONAL COVID-19 RISK, LOS ANGELES COUNTY



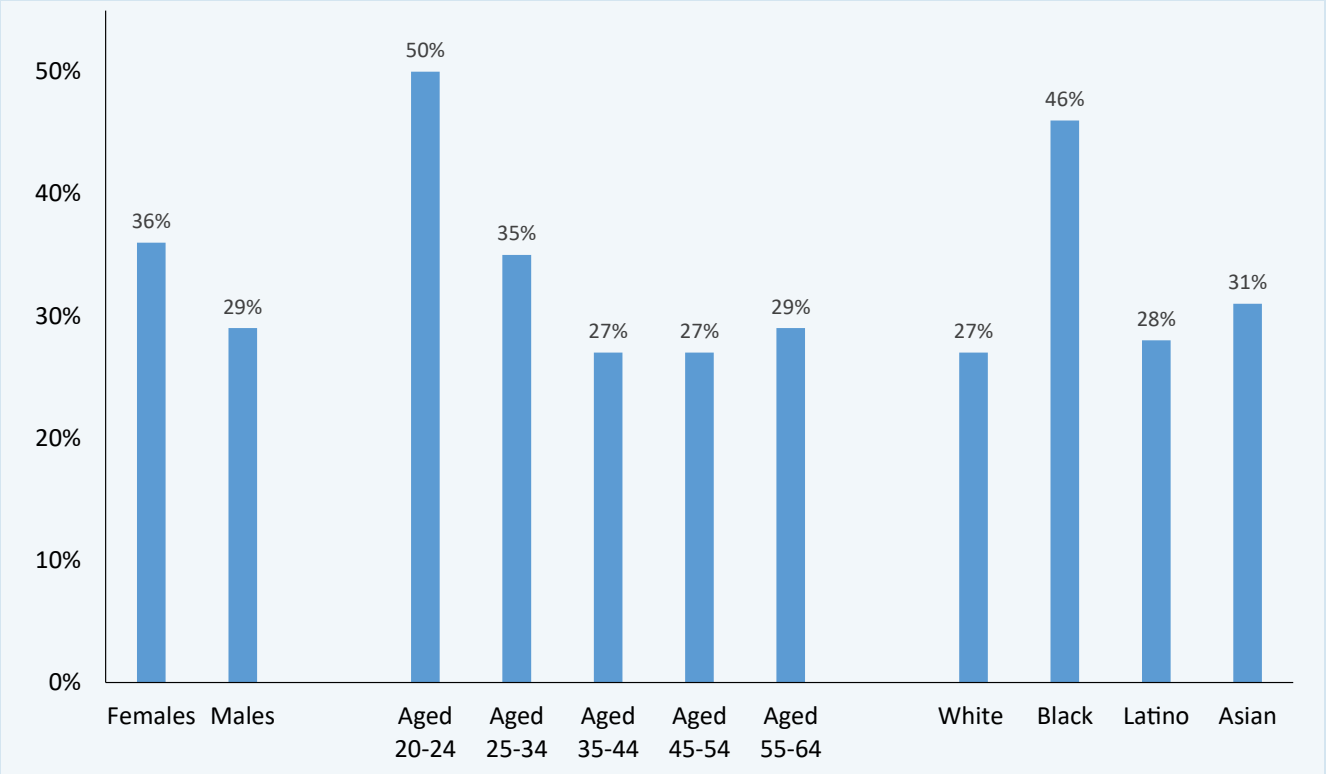
Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of data from the 2018 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA and O*NET. Note: Universe includes employed civilian noninstitutional population age 16 or older in occupations with valid data for the O*NET physical proximity score. Essential occupations were identified based on an assessment of information from federal and state sources. Higher-risk occupations are defined as having an O*NET physical proximity score of greater than 3.25.

COVID-19 is particularly concerning for our elder residents. In Los Angeles County, more Black seniors (36 percent) are living alone (without family members and not in assisted living) than any other group.[11] Living alone is a risk factor because it can create a lack of access to resources and social support.[12] Poverty has a similar effect and in Los Angeles County, seniors of color are also far more likely to live below 150 percent of the poverty level than white seniors.[13] Seniors need the most support because they are particularly vulnerable to the pandemic: statewide, they are 11 percent of the positive cases but 74 percent of the fatalities.[14]

Workers deemed essential and in high-risk positions require our special attention. "Essential" is defined by federal and state governments as "must-open" enterprises (such as health care, agriculture, logistics, and grocery stores) and "high-risk" defined as having to work in close proximity with others. Around 30 percent of Black, U.S.-born Latino and immigrant Asian workers in Los Angeles County fall in that category while about a quarter of immigrant Latino, U.S-born Asian American and Pacific Islander, Native American and workers of mixed or another race do. The figure is a striking 38 percent for Pacific Islander immigrants (helping to explain the overexposure metrics offered above); by contrast, only 17 percent of white workers are in essential, higher risk work.

Equally important is the overrepresentation of Latinos, African Americans, and Native Americans in what is considered "non-essential" but close proximity work – sectors like hospitality and retail where there were sharp initial lay-offs and where we have seen a grudging start-stop rebound.[15] The combination means that workers of color have been both more likely to be stressed by job loss and more likely to be showing up for dangerous employment – a sort of worst of both economic worlds. With the economic pain pressing, one focus group participant said of her experience in the COVID-19 era: "[I'm] just

FIGURE 4. SHARE OF CALIFORNIA LABOR FORCE HAVING FILED FOR UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS



Source: California Policy Lab, California Unemployment Insurance Claims During the COVID-19 Pandemic. August 6, 2020. Available at: https://www.capolicylab.org/california-unemployment-insurance-claims-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/#int-aug-6.
Note: Data counts the number of unique individuals filing claims between 3/15 and 7/25 as a share of each group's pre-crisis (February) labor force. Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) claimants are included.

trying not to panic as each bill shows up."

The unemployment pain and the resulting economic stress has been unequally distributed. As can be seen in Figure 4, women have been hit harder than men, the young much harder than those who are older, and Black workers far harder than every other ethnic group. For women, this can mean a particularly painful strain, particularly for single mothers who have also seen child centers and schools shut, adding to their responsibilities at home. For the young, coming of age during a recession – and experiencing this pronounced detachment from the labor market – can have long-lasting impacts on wage trajectories and occupational mobility.[16] And for African Americans, the current pattern just adds to what have been persistently higher levels of unemployment over decades.

The region's vibrant immigrant community has also been uniquely undermined in this crisis.[17] Contrary to the imaginations of many, about 70 percent of

> ***Coronavirus has attacked all the families of the world, but as they say, different boats in the same storm. am listening to all that you all are saying and others who are losing everything, including losing their lives, and it is sad. But, I feel like it has really hit the Latinos harder, because, for example, Latinos don't have the different governmental programs of the country, due to documentation and all of that, and I don't think it is due to lack of sensitivity, but rather due to lack of access.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

undocumented Angelenos have been here for more than a decade.[18] As a result, they are often deeply embedded in our businesses, communities, and families; indeed, about 18 percent of Angelenos are either undocumented themselves or live with

such a family member.[19] And while undocumented immigrants are offering their labor, contributing economically, and paying taxes, they have been barred from federal relief programs, including the so-called "stimulus checks" aimed at short-term assistance in the current crisis.

Exclusion from these programs is not just damaging to undocumented immigrants, but to entire family units and our region. For example, the CARES Act actually denied aid to entire households who file taxes jointly when one individual files taxes with an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN), the usual method of filing for undocumented earners.[20] In Los Angeles County alone, approximately 200,000 children, nearly 90 percent of whom are citizens, live in such households.[21] And while short-term bandaids for the undocumented are welcome – such as the Angeleno Card launched out of the Mayor's Fund or the Governor's $125 million relief fund – the failure to provide a sustained wage backstop is likely one reason why COVID-19 has ripped its way through immigrant Latino communities.[22]

Many of those same families are also likely to be on the wrong side of the digital divide, a particularly troublesome situation when COVID-19 quickly developed into a pandemic and students were sent home and distance learning ensued. As can be seen in Figure 5, while only 13 percent of white kids in school found themselves lacking high-speed internet and a laptop or desktop in the household, that figure was 37 percent for Black children, 39 percent for Latino children, and around 25 percent for Pacific Islander and Native American children.[23] Schools tried to fill the gap by providing equipment but, "about half the students in low-income-serving [school] districts had computers available for school work when campuses closed" while the figure was nearly 90 percent for

COVID-19 is only one of multiple stressors that undocumented Angelenos face. Victoria Galindo Lopez was featured in the Los Angeles Times as a critical essential worker: she is employed as a hotel cleaner for a hotel that participates in Los Angeles' Project Roomkey, a program that houses individuals experiencing homelessness in Los Angeles. But even as she is helping other Angelenos and assuming the potential threat of catching COVID-19 and bringing it home to her family, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has issued a deportation date for her. Like most undocumented Angelenos, she has been in the country long-term, raised a family, and developed deep ties to the community. None of these protect her, even in the midst of a pandemic outbreak. And while her lawyer attempts to fight this deportation order, she and her family continue to work in essential services.

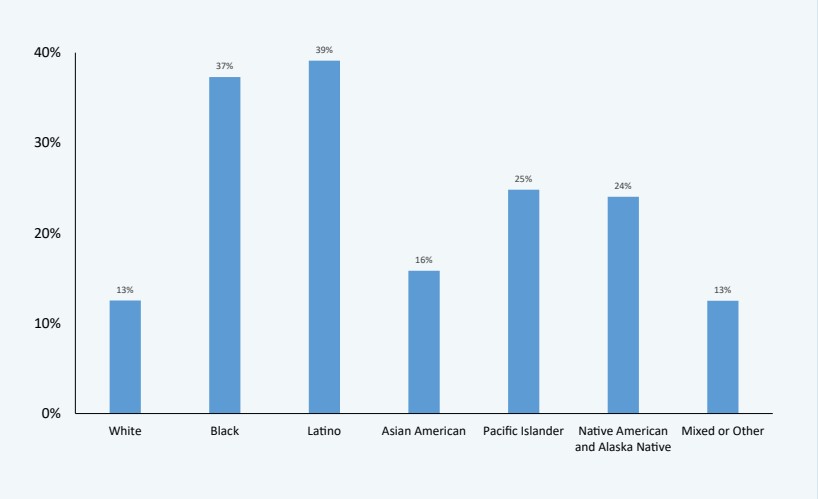
Source: Cindy Carcamo, "She's an essential worker, helping the homeless. But ICE plans to deport her next week." Los Angeles Times, June 4, 2020.

students in high-income districts and was nearly 100 percent three weeks after remote learning began.[24]

These students have also been trying to study in dramatically overcrowded households. While about 10 percent of white children in K-12 in the county went home to an over-crowded household, the figure is double that for Black children and 47 percent for Latino and Pacific Islander children.[25] As for extreme over-crowding, the figure is only two percent for white children in K-12, but five percent for Black kids, ten percent for Pacific Islanders, and a startling 18 percent for Latino kids. Many observers are rightly worried about a learning loss that will persist over time and simply reinforce disadvantage.[26]

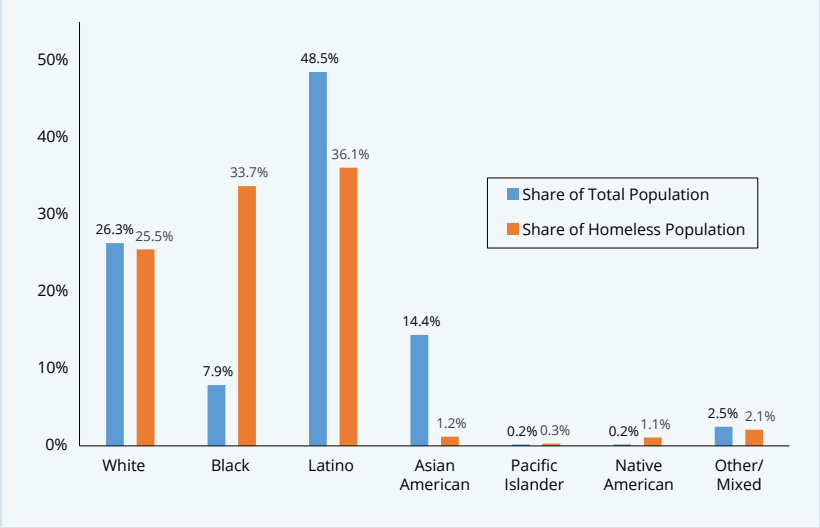
Of course, many children and families did not have houses to return to. Homelessness in Los Angeles County has risen from its already shocking pre-COVID-19 levels, measured at more than 66,000 individuals back in January 2020. The racial contours of this are clear: while Black Angelenos represent about 8 percent of the total county population, they constitute over a third of the population experiencing homelessness (see Figure 6).[27] In addition, the share of Native Americans who are homeless is roughly five-fold their share of the county.[28] Just as striking: before COVID-19, the unhoused population was already on the increase, with 2019 seeing 83,000 newly houseless, and around 60 percent of those

FIGURE 5: PERCENT OF CHILDREN UNDER 18 WHO ATTEND K-12 THAT LACK A COMPUTER AND HIGH SPEED INTERNET AT HOME BY RACE



Source: USC Program for Environmental and Regional Equity analysis of the 2018 5-year American Community Survey microdata from IPUMS USA. Note: Data reflect a 2014 through 2018 average.

FIGURE 6: HOMELESSNESS BY RACE/ETHNICITY IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY, JANUARY 2020



Source: Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority. Greater Los Angeles Homeless Count 2020, June 12, 2020. Accessed at: https://www.lahsa.org/documents?id=4558-2020-greater-los-angeles-homeless-count-presentation

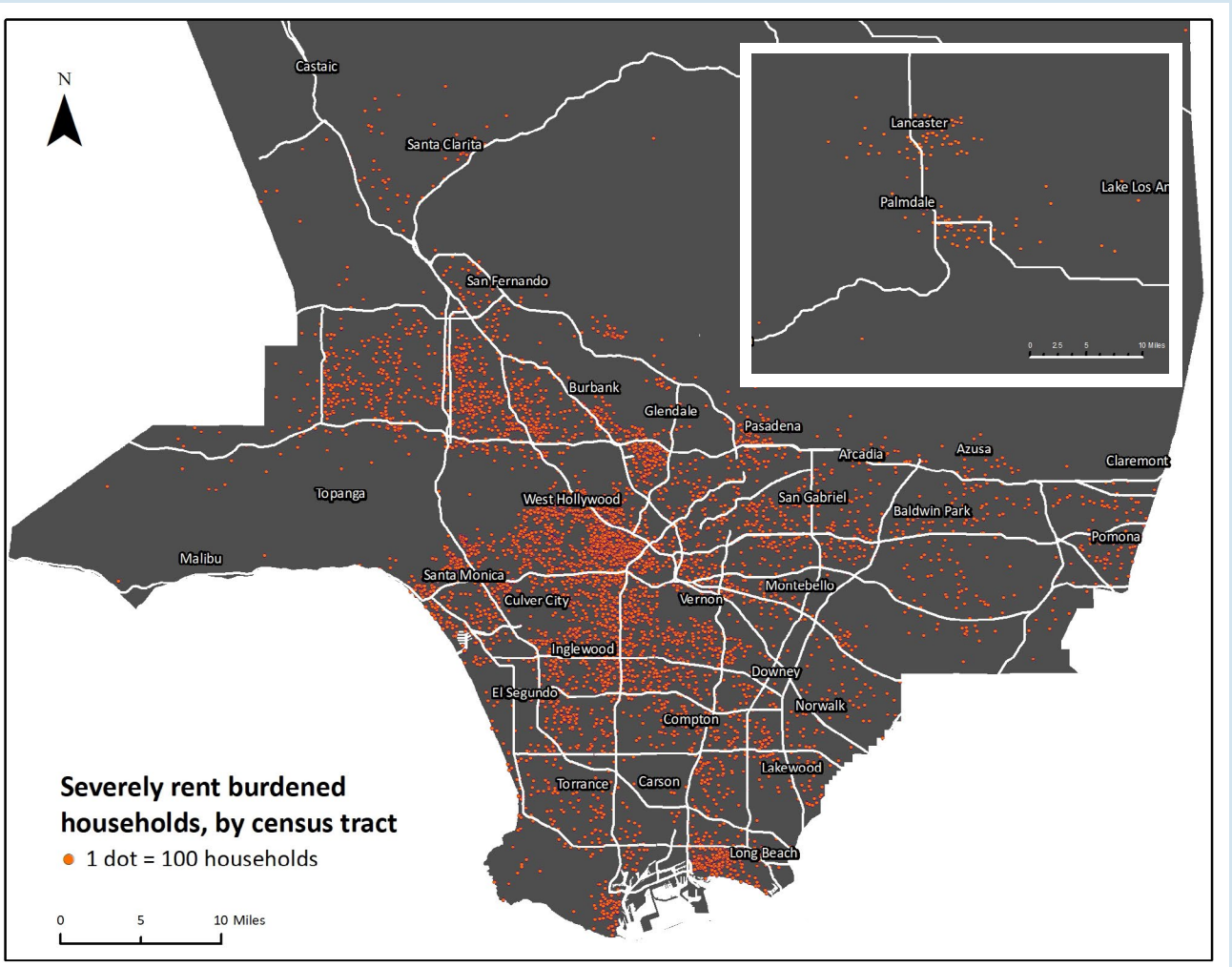
> ***"I'm currently in between places. I stay in a household of eight people. We currently just added some more. So now it's up to 11 people in the house, a whole family. So . . . I'll go stay with my dad 'cause he's just one person. So that's like a breather for me."***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

reporting economic hardship as the main reasons for winding up on the street.

Indeed, even before the pain of this pandemic, many people in Los Angeles were already one rent payment (or mortgage payment) away from the streets. About 30 percent of white renter households are considered severely rent-burdened (meaning that they pay more than fifty percent of their income in rent) while the figure rises to 37 percent for Black households and 34 percent for Latino immigrant households; the geographic pattern, reflected in Figure 7, shows an overconcentration of such distressed renters in South LA, the Southeast Cities, Long Beach, and parts of the San Fernando Valley.[29] It is little wonder that a "pulse survey" from the U.S. Census Bureau found large disparities in eviction worries: more than half of all Latino renter householders and 35 percent of Black renter householders in California expressed low confidence in making August's rent as opposed to 17 percent of white householders in the state.[30]

There is also a racial disparity in homeowner burden: 32 percent of white homeowners are considered housing-burdened (meaning they pay more than thirty percent of their income on mortgage and other costs) while 42 percent of Black homeowners, 40 percent of Latino homeowners, and 41 percent of Native American homeowners are similarly burdened.[31] Many are worried that the foreclosure crisis of the 2008-2009 Great Recession – in which there was a sharp decline in Black and Latino homeownership and net wealth – is a preview of what may be ahead.[32]

FIGURE 7. SEVERELY RENT BURDENED HOUSEHOLDS BY CENSUS TRACT, 2018



Source: USC Equity Research Institute analysis of the 2018 5-year American Community Survey summary file; U.S. Census Bureau, GeoLytics, Inc.; TomTom, ESRI, HERE, Garmin, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS user community. Note: Data reflect a 2014 through 2018 average.

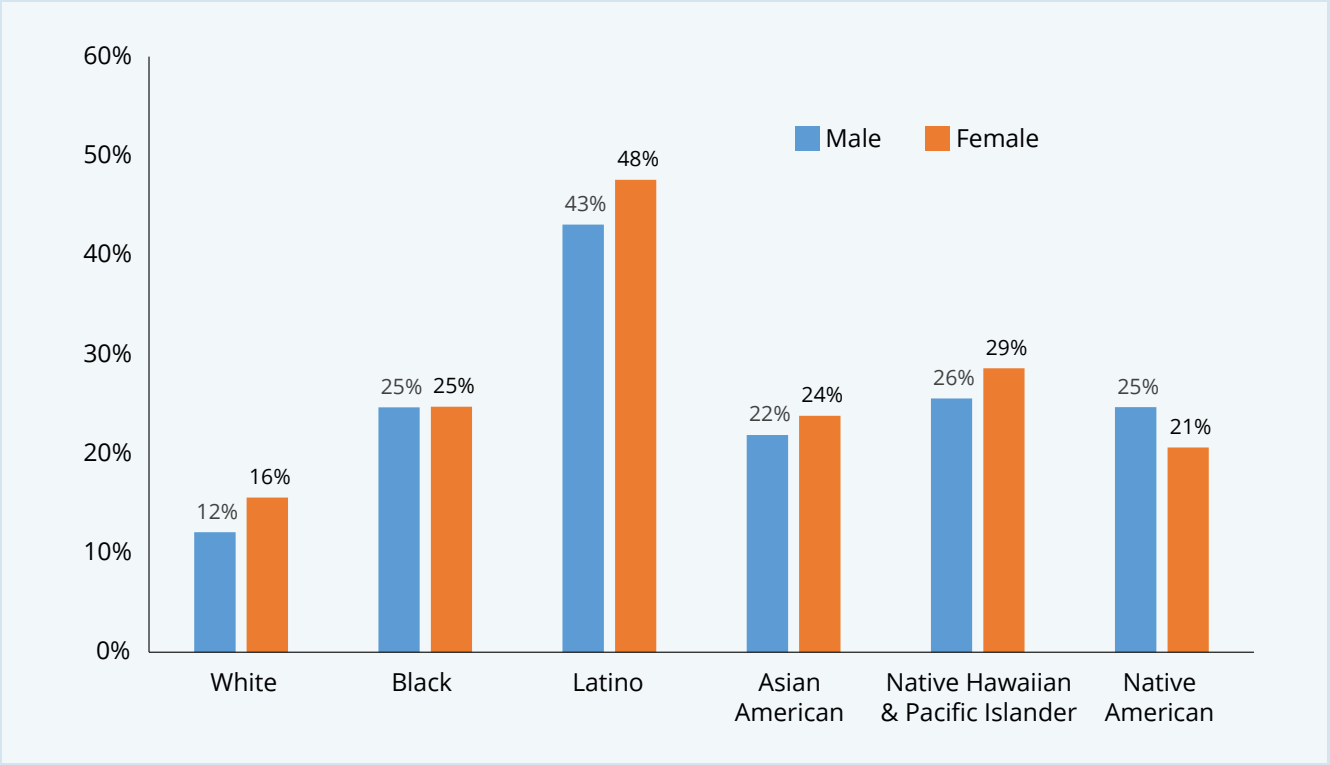
The Context for Change

Much of this data is disturbing but, in some sense, little of it is news. Prior to COVID-19, Los Angeles County was already a complex region to navigate, particularly for lower-income communities of color. Since the early 1990s, Los Angeles County's economy has lagged behind the nation in job growth and excelled in rates of working poverty – that is, having a full-time time job with subpar pay. The region has lost middle-wage jobs and seen median household income mostly stagnate until a recent uptick after 2016; meanwhile, there has been a widening divide as both low-wage and high-wage jobs have proliferated and economic fortunes have grown apart.[33]

Racial and gender gaps have persisted in labor and housing markets as well. Black Angelenos have faced higher rates of joblessness across all educational levels. Even for those who are working full-time, year-round, the share of people of color making less than $15 an hour is much higher than it is for whites (see Figure 8). And this is not just a function of education: among full-time workers, there are stark racial gaps in wages even when taking into account education. For example, Black workers in Los Angeles County with a high school degree make about $5 an hour less than white workers with a high school degree while Black workers with at least a bachelor's degree or higher make $8 less an hour than whites with the same educational background; the disparities are even worse for similarly educated Latino workers. Moreover, the gaps (in inflation-adjusted 2018 dollars) between both Black and Latino workers and comparable white workers at these two education levels have actually gotten worse since 1990.[34]

> ***"That lawmakers are here at all, plotting last-minute rescue missions and contingency plans to ward off the unthinkable, is, yes, due to an unforeseen pandemic, which has killed thousands and upended the economy. But it's also the inevitable result of kicking the can down the road on all manner of things, from the lack of affordable housing that has led to rampant homelessness and poverty, to the systemic racism that has had a hand in every unfair way that COVID-19 has played out in California."***
>
> ***- Erika D. Smith, "Facing a wave of evictions, California is about to make thousands of kids homeless," Los Angeles Times, August 7, 2020 (citation in Zotero waiting to be inserted)***

FIGURE 8: SHARE OF WORKERS BY RACE AND GENDER MAKING LESS THAN $15 AN HOUR, LOS ANGELES COUNTY, 2018



Source: USC Equity Research Institute Analysis of 2018 5-year American Community Survey data from IPUMS USA. Universe includes civilian noninstitutionalized full-time wage and salary workers ages 25-64. Note: Full time work is defined as working at least 50 weeks and 35 hours per week during the year prior to the survey. Data reflect a 2014 through 2018 average.

Meanwhile, rents have continued upward, and estimates suggest that the region is half a million units short of what is required to meet the affordable housing demand.[35] The racial disparities in renter and homeowner burden were noted above; partly because of lower pay and higher costs, homeownership rates, a marker of personal wealth, vary significantly by race and ethnicity: 33 percent for African Americans, 34 percent for Pacific Islanders, 38 percent for Latinos, and 42 percent for Native Americans versus 53 and 54 percent for Asian American and white households.[36]

Indeed, the Los Angeles metro is ranked 102 of the top 150 metro areas in the U.S. in terms of Black homeownership – and actually dead-last in the country for overall homeownership.[37] The extraordinarily low level of Black homeownership reflects a history of segregation, redlining, and real estate steering, often reinforced by policing practices.[38] Indeed, of the top 51 metro areas with a population exceeding one million and a Black population exceeding a three percent share, Los Angeles is the nation's tenth most segregated metro.[39] Meanwhile Black and other communities of color have also found themselves traumatized by excess policing, worries about immigration status, and inadequate access to health care.

> ***I've lived in LA County, my entire life. And just knowing that now that I'm in a spot where I'm able to pay my bills, I'm still not able to save enough to say that I'm finally going to help my mom with rent someday.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

Into that context has arrived COVID-19, an economic downturn, and nationwide attention to anti-Black police violence. This is not the first time that Los Angeles has weathered an economic shock or been forced to look at systemic racism. The Watts Rebellion of 1965 and the Uprisings in 1992 were both sparked by acts of police brutality and signaled the need to reckon with entrenched

disparities and anti-Black racism. In both instances, reports were written and plans were launched to deal with underlying under-investment – but little fundamentally changed, particularly for Black Angelenos.

So what is different this time? We suggest that at least three things have changed – and taken together, they may signal a possibility for a better future.

The first is the depth of the shift in political and cultural attitudes. The murders of George Floyd and others has prompted a deep national examination of racism – with the realization dawning for some (long present for others) that brutal policing is just the tip of an iceberg of structural racism. These most recent murders came on the heels of racialized infection and death rates from COVID-19, as noted above, which themselves unmasked deep racial inequalities in exposure and risk. And this, after years of national leadership stirring hate, partly to obscure widening income gaps leaving so many Americans behind. With the wounds open and causes clear, there is a sense that we need to get things right this time.

We are already seeing ideas catch on that were once considered outside the political box. Police budgets have been trimmed and incarcerated individuals have been allowed to leave in the name of public health.[40] Unemployment insurance payments have been set at a level that mimics a $15 an hour minimum wage while discussions of universal basic income have surged. And California voters have been queued up to rethink a ban on Affirmative Action that was one of a series of "racial propositions" that in the 1990s contributed to, among other things, the criminalization of Black youth, marginalization of immigrants, and the derailing of public education.[41]

The second change has been a growing recognition – in the public, among policy makers, and in the academy – that the current levels of inequality and racism threaten everyone. A growing body of research shows that income inequality, racial segregation, and metropolitan fragmentation have been major drags on regional prosperity.[42] One manifestation of the rapidly growing income and wealth inequality is the growing housing affordability crisis.[43] A study by two prominent economists found that housing affordability constraints have reduced economic growth by 36 percent over the period from 1964-2009 because of reduced worker opportunity in higher productivity cities.[44]

This expanding sense of interdependence is not just limited to liberal leaders in the social sector. Nationally, the Business Roundtable issued a 2019 declaration signed by 181 CEOs committing to a vision of shared prosperity in which corporate responsibility extends to the full range of stakeholders, including employees and communities.[45] Locally, the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation, a main architect of our region's economic strategy, has begun to insist that equity is central and that business should exercise more leadership on this front.[46] And the COVID-19 crisis itself has driven this home: we can only reboot our economy when education, testing, and health care reaches the most vulnerable communities.

> ***. . . and now I'm having some downtime to really rethink them along with all that is coming to the fore with realities of injustice and systems of injustice, so that we can rethink how we enter in to never a normal of that. Again, whatever that was because it was benefiting no one.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

When equity principles guide our decision-making, our communities will change. We will begin to worry about shortchanging our youth with inadequate spending on education. Employers will begin to worry about the talent they lose when they let the criminal justice system destroy so many Black and Latino lives. LA's civic leaders will begin to realize that our current racial disparities – which cost us an estimated more than $300 billion a year in lost regional GDP – must finally be addressed once and for all.[47] Our point: the costs of disconnection are too great, the benefits of mutuality are too promising, and the prospects for change are too real to let this moment slip.

> ***"It sounds like none of us are well until all of us are well and the underserved communities need to be served more because it also puts stress on the communities that are overserved."***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

The third big change in this moment is emerging power of community-based organizations to change politics-as-usual. We are great believers in research – but ultimately we know that bad ideas can triumph and good ideas can falter if unattached to authentic community voices that can shift the political calculus and force accountability. Fortunately, Los Angeles has a wealth of such organizations. In both the mid-1960s and the early 1990s, such groups that existed or began in response to the crises of those eras. But the depth, sophistication, and reach of today's community-based infrastructure is historically unique.[48] They have been able to protect immigrants, raise wages, ensure more equity in education spending, and force a plan to close one of the nation's largest jails.[49]

Strong community voices are a critical asset to ensuring that the systems changes this report recommends are actually implemented, measured, and evaluated. Community leaders will not be satisfied with working around the edges or coming up with quick answers and short-term solutions. Today's reckoning is about admitting that the current system is designed to create the outcomes we have today and that that this is not acceptable.

> ***"So, I think that you have to invest in the infrastructure of these community groups on the ground that are centered around people and equity. So, that might vary from community to community, group to group, but there needs to be more intentionality on the communities we're serving, the leaders we're serving. We need deeper targets, because if we just sprinkle a little here, a little bit there, we do not get meaningful results. We see them right now, and it's not working."***
>
> ***- Jacqueline Waggoner, Committee for Greater LA***

But while the community is ahead of the institutions and structures, the non-profit sector from which so many of these community voices hail is threatened by our current resource shortfalls. Local philanthropy has stepped in to provide emergency support but this will need to continue – and indeed step up – if we are to take advantage of this current moment of heightened awareness around structural racism, widespread recognition of our mutual obligations, and what seems to be an emerging determination that this time really will be different.

So What Should We Do?

In the accompanying policy report, we offer recommendations by issue area, with many specific ideas from which change agents can choose. Here, we offer a series of ten broad principles for an equitable and inclusive Los Angeles.

1 The first is the need to **address anti-Black racism in all its forms**. Statistic after statistic on homelessness, education, family wealth, health and wellbeing, and the criminal justice system show ample evidence of the structural racism that has long limited Black economic and social progress. The Watts Rebellion of 1965 and the 1992 Uprisings provoked a sudden wave of attention to Black fortunes, but the consistently differential outcomes for Black Angelenos show that the series of reforms have been ineffective. If we truly want to move the needle for racial justice in this moment, we must center racial equity, particularly the situation of Black Angelenos, in all our policies and practices.

We need not look far to identify those who can lead with and for Black Los Angeles. The region is home to one of the nation's most active chapters of Black Lives Matter (indeed, LA hosts the first chapter of BLM) as well as historic and contemporary organizations founded to uplift Black Angelenos. Many of these groups came together in April 2020 to produce a coherent and collective set of demands with regard to COVID-19 testing and treatment in Black communities, support for Black workers and businesses, housing, healthcare, community safety and more.[50] But while strong Black leadership at the political and community level is abundant, there is a need for more consistent philanthropic investments in the Black community groups and grassroots leadership that can help realize a more inclusive LA

Another feature of the organizing landscape: South LA in particular has developed a cadre of Latino and other leaders who have been forged in the fires of Black-Brown struggle against racism, and have come out with a commitment to weaving together common

> ***"Reparations. We need reparations, it only makes perfect sense for our healing and the healing of the lanes. In total, we need reparations, we need police reform. So, the culture of the police needs total reformation. We need housing to be a human right. We need for all the social service organizations to have a standard way of serving, whether it be them looking at their culture within the organization and how they serve their staff and using the model of allowing their clients to be a part of the designing of their programs and services. So, allowing those who are being impacted by the social services to have some say in the services that are being designed and implemented in communities, we need a lot more spaces of conversations for healing, for validation, for what folks are experiencing."***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

politics that both celebrate intersections *and* center the fight against anti-Black racism in particular.[51] They understand that the demonization of those receiving social assistance, the criminalization of those who are poor, the excusing of constant police violence, and the marginalization of immigrants of color all have their roots in anti-Black racism – and challenging anti-Blackness is everyone's business.[52]

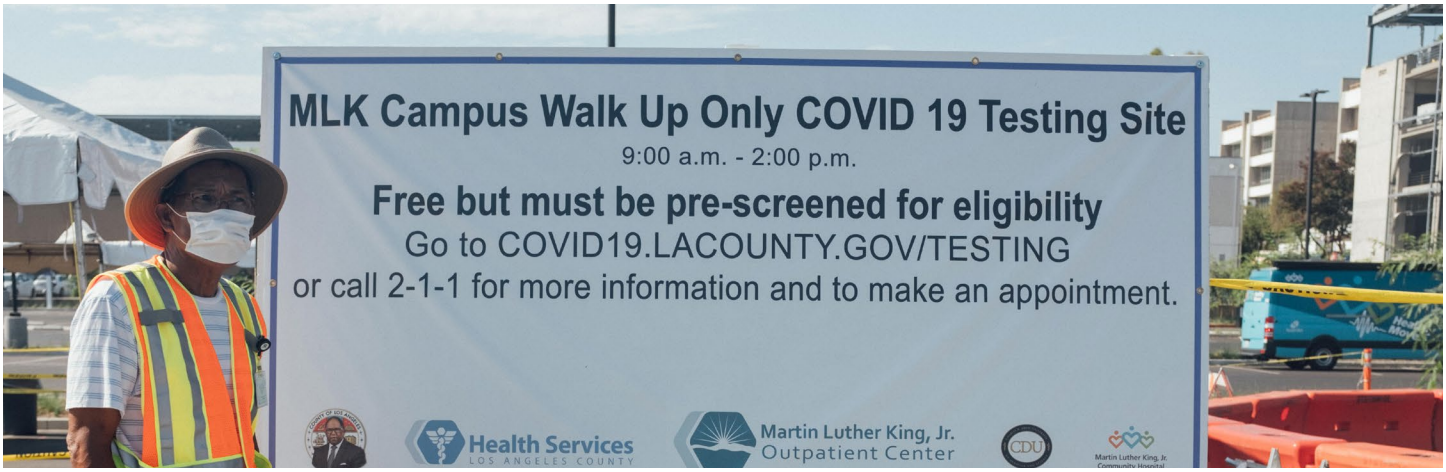
> ***"All of that is connected to poverty, education, and changing the narrative [to how] the systems are broken…. we are addressing these shortfalls, and not from a punitive standpoint, [by] bringing in social workers maybe as coaches for family members. If there are schools with a [large] Black population—because again, 25 percent of the absenteeism is Black youth—then how can we align some of those dollars [away] from police officers to maybe coaches to support families? Having them understand the importance, early on, that if a student misses more than five days to school during a school year, that they are already going to be behind from an academic standpoint."***
>
> ***- Charisse Bremond Weaver, Committee for Greater LA***

However, like many contemporary cities, Los Angeles has seen an erosion of Black space and Black power. In their new book, *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*, Sandy Darity and Kirsten Mullen (2020) note that "the ongoing destruction of comparatively affluent Black communities no longer is achieved primarily via white riots or outright fraud, but by somewhat more subtle mechanisms—first, by urban renewal and, second, by gentrification."[53] This has been particularly the case in South Central, the heart of historic Black Los Angeles, a place which has also seen a major demographic shift to now being two-thirds Latino. The possibility of another foreclosure crisis from the COVID-19-induced economic crisis could lead to more wealth stripping and displacement of Black Angelenos. We need to follow the lead of Black leaders who are calling for an anti-racist agenda, reimagination of public safety, redirection of dollars away from policing and toward social needs, and an assurance of employment and housing. The accompanying policy report offers numerous ways in which to work toward those goals.

2 The second principle is the need to **build an economy that prioritizes those who have been left or kept behind**. For too long, Los Angeles' deeply entrenched poverty—itself deeply shaped by structural racism—has resulted from a malfunctioning economy that has left workers and communities on the edge of survival and suffering from stark racial gaps in income and wealth. Indeed, the median net worth of LA's white households is roughly 100 times larger than that of Black and Latino families, a fact that both reflects a legacy of redlining and exclusion, and also structurally limits the future.[54] There is a critical need to push for national scale solutions including immigration reform and reparations; however, there are changes we can make at the local level. Businesses and financial institutions can play a role for good in this context: subcontracting with businesses owned by people of color; recruiting, retaining, and promoting workers of color; and providing financial instruments for asset building in oppressed communities. Such efforts can help to overcome existing racial income and wealth gaps.

> ***We've prioritized my wife's work so that we can make sure that she seems essential. We don't want her to miss any Zoom meetings, anything like that, because when it comes down the line and they have to decide who is essential and who isn't, we want to make sure that she's dotted all her I's and crossed all her T's and she's been there … she's always 100% available, even though she doesn't need to be as available. We've got this question mark of the furlough, in the future.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

While the private sector can show us what is possible, we need policies to make equity widespread. With workers particularly vulnerable to exploitation and illness, sectoral Safety Boards that can more effectively guarantee employee wellbeing and facilitate the re-opening of the economy. They are especially needed in sectors where unionization



is low and workers voices can be easily muted.[55] Strong incentives for apprenticeship are critical—particularly for workers with barriers to employment, like those who were formerly incarcerated, who are undocumented, who have a disability, and who were in the foster care system—all of whom can easily get lost when the pool of others seeking jobs becomes so large, as it has now. Now is the perfect time to engage in a shift towards more diverse hiring practices as the economy reboots. Reconfiguring how we use information like background checks or reassessing interview processes are critical steps that can be taken now before hiring starts again and we develop the same employment inequities. Rooting out explicit and implicit bias would also be more straight-forward if we resurrected Affirmative Action and other anti-racist practices to secure equity in hiring and diversified corporate boards. Other efforts could include the promotion of higher-wage jobs that can sustain families and the full inclusion of immigrants in our workforce.

In the midst of COVID-19 recovery, we have a few special challenges to be prioritized: we need to support small businesses owned by people of color that have been most sharply impacted by the downturn. We need to help workers choose work – perhaps by novel approaches like work-sharing, in which employers agree to continue to provide benefits while hours are reduced and unemployment insurance is made available.[56] We need to pay special attention to Black workers, nearly half of whom have filed unemployment claims since the crisis began, well above the 31 percent for Asian American workers, 28 percent for Latino workers, and 27 percent for white workers.[57] As Lola Smallwood Cuevas of the UCLA Labor Center notes, "Black families really do sit at the crosshairs of a racialized economy", and their needs must be addressed.[58]

> ***I'm familiar with the technology, but I know that there was many parents that they didn't have that technology. So, we found ourselves helping other family members to kind of set that up. It was, if we had an extra tablet or whatever, like having that be something borrowed to, to another family member to be able to support.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

It is also critical to realize that the internet has come to be a segment of Main Street in our daily lives. It is not only the site of most communication and news distribution, it also plays a pivotal role in research and teaching that have made it virtually indispensable to the contemporary educational experience, with or without COVID-19. In addition, a huge portion of American commerce takes place on the web, most communication with insurance, most interactions with government, including paying car registrations, property taxes and so forth. It is nearly impossible and at an increasing cost to conduct most forms of business over the phone instead of online, including utilities, travel, college applications, registration, and on and on. Indeed, even finding the schedules and addresses of brick-and-mortar businesses make the web an auxiliary part of in-person commerce. It is no longer appropriate to think of broadband internet access as a luxury good, nor even a market utility. Rather, the internet should be viewed as infrastructure, a critical public good whose provision to all is among the foundational responsibilities of governing a society of equals.

Finally, we need to understand that while a 21st century economy necessitates closing the digital

divide, our future is not just about the glitter of tech, but also about the infrastructure of care. We have seen what happens when child care collapses, elder care is inadequate, and families have to make hard choices. While many think of demographic change in terms of a growing share of people of color, this growth has flattened out in Los Angeles County. The main story has shifted to the aging of the population and the stresses on the "sandwich generation." Child care and elder care is unaffordable for many but critical for us all – and improving the wages and working conditions of those doing care work, a labor force that is overwhelmingly Black and immigrant women, would substantially help communities and families.

3 Third, we need to **support the health of communities and individuals living with the trauma of systemic neglect and oppression**. Certainly, the COVID-19 crisis has revealed gaps in medical coverage in the county, including lack of insurance, low reimbursement rates from Medi-Cal, under-investment in outpatient care, prevention, and case management, and a lack of diversity among medical professionals. Universal health insurance at the national level would be most effective at closing gaps but we can also expand state health insurance programs to include everyone – including undocumented Angelenos. Improvements in reimbursement rates and investments in preventive care are also critical.

> ***"[I'm] a single mother who's a survivor of domestic violence. Also 'cause family recovering from a very traumatic incident where my son was shot in front of my home. So, I had to move. … There was already a lot of mental stress on us, right? [And] my job is being a caretaker and so I was very afraid of like, what does this look like now that I'm still having to go and helping take care of a person and, having to go out and shop for them and also shop for my children and try to be safe and all of that."***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

Physical and mental health care need to take into account systemic racism. Black patients are twice as likely as white patients to have the police involved in their first episode of psychosis and the police shooting of an unarmed Black American has a statistically significant impact on the mental health of other Black residents in that same state (but not on white residents).[59] Mental and emotional stress can cause all sorts of challenges, so ending the scourge of police violence and over-incarceration as well as supporting those who have been traumatized by our racist systems is critical for recovery. We should also ensure both private health insurance and MediCal provide equitable and flexible funding that can provide access to mental health services on demand.

> ***We feel sad and depressed. Financially, due to the lack of work. We don't have any money coming in. Socially, because we can't get together with our family. In my case, there is my father-in-law, aunts, or brothers and sisters… and culturally, because we can't get together for special occasions with anyone and almost all the places are closed and it has changed our way of life.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

Similarly, immigrants have withstood ongoing systemic trauma. Because of our nation's penchant for detention and deportation—and some particularly gruesome versions of that under the current administration—immigrant communities have developed fear of any system that might be perceived as having connections with immigration authorities—including health services for which they are eligible.[60] In a health crisis like COVID-19, finding ways to restore trust between communities of color and public health officials as well as connecting everyone to health services is critical.

> ***I have drug addiction in my past … the alcoholics are all drinking again. My friends who used to use drugs, they've all relapsed since this started. And, the urge is certainly there.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

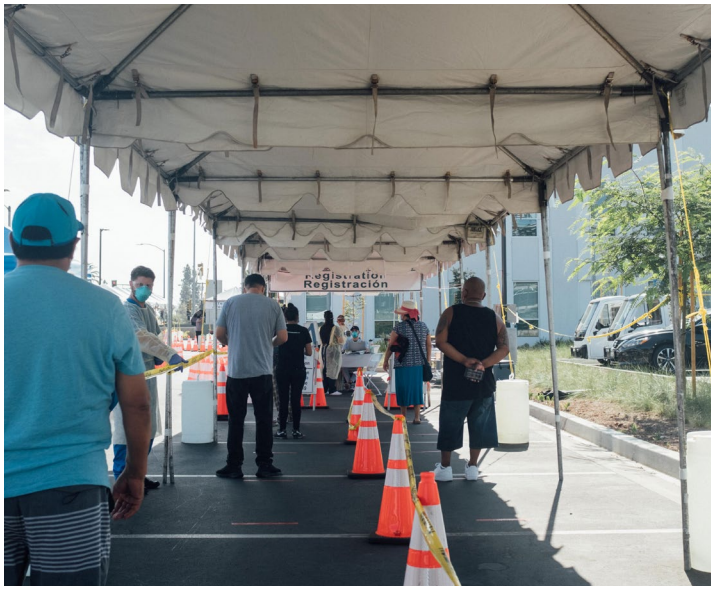
Most of all, we need to recognize the trauma of growing up in a society where systemic devaluation is the norm. Whether it is discrimination at work or in real estate, microaggressions from everyday

acquaintances, or relentlessly racialized images from the media—the lives of people of color, particularly Black and Indigenous peoples, are consistently undermined. The impact that has on youth and adult wellbeing is profound. Below we talk about the need to invest in youth development that emphasizes healing and self-care. We can do this by promoting healing and resilience as well as culturally informed care across the lifespan. This includes diversifying the workforce with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) providers, particularly doctors. We can also encourage social connection and the development of social networks through social connection hubs.

4 A fourth main principle is the need to **create housing for all and end unsheltered homelessness**. As noted before, estimates suggest that the region is half a million units short of what is required to meet the affordable housing demand.[61] Meeting the housing crisis requires preservation, protection, and production of affordable units—as well as meeting the key challenge of housing more than 66,000 people experiencing homelessness across Los Angeles.[62] In some ways, LA has been trying to do the right thing in lieu of stronger federal investment: voters passed a series of measures (HHH and H) that were designed to both build permanent supportive housing and deliver necessary services.

> ***"If we are building new supportive housing, for example, in a community that has unhealthful air, have issues related to water quality, and industrial pollution, we may be providing more housing, but we may be putting people also in harm's way from a health standpoint. So this has to be considered together. It goes back to my argument about how we can promulgate policy, but if we really want to promulgate policy with a racial equity lens, we should give some consideration to whether or not a policy is racist or anti-racist. … Does this policy center racial equity or does it unwittingly take us away from it?"***
>
> ***- Fred Ali, Committee for Greater LA***

For those who are unhoused, the county's immediate



COVID-19 response led to the sheltering of more than 6,000 people, with two-thirds of those individuals being assisted through the Project Roomkey effort that opened up hotel spaces to the unhoused.[63] Moving forward will require fulfilling the current commitment to place 15,000 people experiencing homelessness in permanent housing, creating 45,000 new options for housing placement, speeding up the process of placement, and providing robust wrap-around services.[64]

Thousands of Angelenos – and maybe hundreds of thousands – stand just an eviction notice away from becoming unhoused.[65] For them, we need to consider extending moratoria on evictions with a full understanding that the current relief from, for example, the City of Los Angeles, is not enough and that simply adding up back-payments to be due another day is not viable. Long-term income trajectories have been diminished by the economic downturn and renters were burdened by costs even before the pandemic.[66] Rent subsidies and additional relief efforts in cash are needed until the health crisis is over.

The challenges with making rent are also impacting small landlords in Los Angeles who are themselves often people of color and just a short distance from their own economic collapse.[67] Because of this, USC economist Gary Painter has suggested developing long-term mechanisms to finance the rent liability, providing breaks on repayments for lower-income renters, and addressing landlord distress through refinancing mortgages.[68]

> ***I have sacrificed a lot to buy my house and then the renters told me that they could not pay the rent. So, March, April, May, and June, we have been stretching the money a lot. So, I went to the bank to ask for a loan and have really battled a lot with this . . . what worries me now is my house payment. I still don't know how I am going to make that.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

Finally, there is no way out of this crisis without simply producing more affordable units. For this, we will need to enlist the government, business, and non-profit sector. All will need to recognize that the scale of the response must reflect the scale of the crisis, that meaningful progress requires tackling the legacies and realities of structural racism, and that accountability across the entire region should be at the core of oversight. While we desperately need traditional and innovative subsidy programs, until we can build non-subsidized housing units at close to the median rent, the region will not be able to make housing affordable for all Angelenos; indeed, more housing production at that price point makes it easier to support an ecosystem in which subsidies play a major role. Leaders will have to stress placing the needs of those facing housing insecurity and those who are not housed ahead of the interests of individual property owners stubbornly resisting density – and they will have to resist the temptation to crowd even more affordable housing only in low-income areas. A combination of measures will be needed, including new sources of funding, zoning reform and streamlining, the enablement of non-subsidized affordable housing development, and governance reform to force the fulfillment of regional housing obligations

5 A fifth main principle is the need to **ensure access, mobility, and voice for immigrants regardless of status**. The rationale for doing so is eminently clear in the current moment: the contact tracers so crucial to stopping the spread of COVID-19 report that phone calls go unanswered and information goes ungiven because of fear of "wage loss, deportation or stigmatization."[69] After years of demonizing immigrants at the federal level, it is hard to garner the sort of trust that is absolutely essential in the current moment. One way to do so is to build on the promotoras health model in which local community members are equipped with knowledge of a particular program or policy who are able to deliver accurate information to those who might not trust outsiders; COVID-19 outreach programs should draw heavily on such expertise.

> ***I'm also thinking about the many families that I talk to on a daily basis who did not qualify for any benefits because of their status, even though they were employed before this. They have been in an industry for many years who basically run those shops and now have nothing to rely on, right? Nothing. There's nothing in place that will protect them. … I think that's something that needs to be addressed. Not only extending some of the benefits, but also opening it up to all workers.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

But Los Angeles and California has a starting point, particularly given the levels of protection that have led political scientist, Karthick Ramakrishnan, to talk about a sort of defacto California citizenship.[70] It would be critical to lean heavily into this position and open up every social and health service – including Medi-Cal and forms of local support – to every Californian regardless of status. Critically, the state and local authorities could fill in where there are gaps in federal support; the state already did this with the $125 million Disaster Relief Assistance for Immigrants program but its target of assisting 150,000 Californians was well below the nearly 600,000 undocumented residents in the state who live below the federal poverty level.[71]

> ***When we're talking about more than a million people that are living and working and contributing to LA County they need to be fully taken into account when thinking about this major recovery plan. So, to me, the work of the Committee is to take on the Master Plan of LA County. It needs to fully consider the needs of these mixed status and immigrant populations that we've already heard about in all areas—whether it's access to healthcare, access to food.***
>
> ***- Cynthia Buiza, Committee for Greater LA***

As for the ability to work without fear, California has already moved to curb the use of E-verify, a system by which legal permission to work is checked.[72] One can imagine a campaign parallel to the "ban the box" effort to persuade companies to drop the system altogether wherever possible. Immigrants with less secure status may also be wary of speaking up at work for fear of repercussions, so implementing Worker Safety Boards, as mentioned earlier, could help protect them in the COVID-19 crisis. Immigrants with DACA also spent the early part of this pandemic in legal limbo—which downplays the very real stress that comes with the possibility of deportation—and any way we can support them is critical.[73] Options may include legal funds, strengthening the LA Justice Fund, and ongoing advocacy within the federal government to regularize their status. Generally, promotion of small immigrant-owned businesses would also be a plus.

Finally, another key element would be to ensure representation of immigrant voices in policy-making, including opening up all boards and commissions to undocumented Californians, creating opportunities to vote in local elections. Alongside this effort, we must continue pursuing an aggressive campaign of naturalizing the 2.2 million California immigrants who meet all the requirements but have not yet become citizens.

6 A sixth main principle is the need to **support education access for all children and all communities**. Educators in Los Angeles County have worked miracles in their efforts to get kids home to safety and then boot up remote learning, including the distribution of over 400,000 devices to make home access possible. But the challenges that have come up along the way have laid bare the state of digital inequality. There is a broad consensus to do something about this – but it cannot just be about laying out lines of high speed internet to families that cannot afford the monthly costs, do not have computing power, and lack the training to be effective users. As noted earlier, addressing the digital divide in all its forms should be a top priority for the nation, the state, and our region: broadband access has become the key lifeline to education, employment, consumption, and civic participation, and, as such, is a public good.

> ***[My kids] didn't really understand that very well and they became sad about it and also because they can't see their friends. They ask what happened and it is hard to explain to them that the Coronavirus got here and what happened because of that. They don't understand and it is difficult for them. And, the online classes are not worth much. I wanted to die . . . I don't know how the teachers do it, honestly, I thanked them very much, because I can't do it with my kids, I get tired very often.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

On the education side, school systems have spent a significant amount of time preparing for various modes of re-opening; eventually, all that planning for in-person or hybrid had to be jettisoned as the community spread of COVID-19 ticked back up this summer. Whether learning resumed online or on-site, an immediate and important goal is to remediate COVID-19 closure learning loss. The state has promised $5.3 billion in "learning loss mitigation" funds (that will also help with distance

learning), and indicated that roughly four-fifths of the dollars should go primarily to those who have the highest needs: low-income students, students with disabilities, foster youth, students experiencing homelessness, and English-language learners.[74]

> ***We need the school system to be integrated in culturally specific understanding. We don't need things to continue on the way that they were before COVID. We need a way of understanding that humanity is a gift and how we get to treat ourselves and our fellows is something that needs to be relearned.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

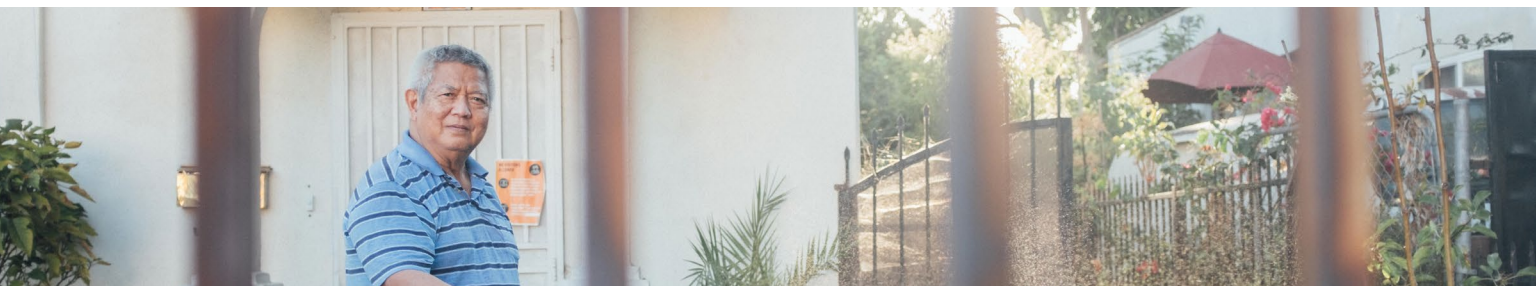
This funding should be coupled with attention to the trauma sure to have affected children in communities that have borne the brunt of the pandemic's health and economic impacts. Likely needed are one-on-one tutoring programs and pairing the most experienced and skilled teachers with the highest need and most marginalized students – and all of this will cost money. But it will not just be learning that may need extra care. Students stuck at home may have missed out on needed nutritional supplements and exercise, may have been exposed to prolonged domestic violence, and more, which under normal circumstances may have been addressed by knowledgeable and sensitive adults in a schools' community of care. Mental health professionals and others may be needed.

As for the role of education in our regional future, we need to develop an equity-oriented and anti-racist student performance framework that both addresses opportunity gaps and community-based disparities, and is also informed by parents and students. We need to make schools the hub of community services provided by non-profits as well as city and county agencies, while empowering students and families to navigate the resources needed to thrive. And we need to make sure that we are figuring out where the resources are to nurture the next generation of Angelenos.

7 A seventh main principle for a reimagined recovery is the need to **celebrate and support youth leadership and empowerment**. Los Angeles County's youth hallmark is their diversity: Latinos comprise the majority, or 62 percent, 10 percent are Asian American, 7 percent are Black, and 17 percent are white.[75] But experience is not reducible to a single dimension; studies have shown that youth who have intersectional identities of race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender identity are disproportionately subject to experiencing disciplinary responses across systems like education, child welfare, and juvenile justice, as compared to their white, straight, cisgender, and gender-conforming peers.[76]

> ***I feel like that's one thing that, you know, everybody goes through like the racism that goes on, the inequality, the injustices that are happening, that happened before. Even with ICE, immigration and all of that.***
>
> ***As youth we're kind of expected to be the future and the present. So we have to make sure that we're doing our part right now and later on. We're like in the center—of people who are younger than us, people who are older than us look to us. So as youth we have to make sure that our mental health is at the right state, but it's not always in the right state. … That is a very big struggle.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

The good news is that Los Angeles County is home to a plethora of youth organizing groups that are seeking to build on these life experiences and intersectional identities in order to nurture LA youth into being effective in achieving the change they seek (and that we desperately need). Through regular meetings and leadership development



programming, these groups typically provide young people with critical and practical civics lessons: providing political education, developing their basic civic skills, and guiding them through public action. To varying degrees, these groups also offer culturally appropriate supports that enhance their educational achievement and career prospects.[77]

> ***"So one of the things that I would want to see would be more resources for youth and families, like for instance, I'm part of an organization that's trying to fight for that in the city of Pomona. We really don't see a lot of resources invested in our youth. And that's where we get a lot of youth going into the prison, school-to-prison pipeline because there isn't enough afterschool activity. There isn't enough resources invested in them that they choose to, they tend to lean more towards the life, just a bad life, and that is not fair to them. So I would want to see more resources invested on youth and families that are struggling."***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

If you listen to what young leaders are asking for, you will hear some useful directions for policy: shift funding from punitive juvenile systems to community-based justice; fund youth centers, youth programming, and youth-serving organizations; support LGBTQ youth and other frequently marginalized groups; lower the voting age to 16 and incorporate youth councils in every form of government; add community organizing to school curriculums and other youth-serving programs; and promote youth economic development, both in terms of connection to employment and training for entrepreneurship. That last item is particularly important: with job loss all around, young people need to be attached to employment as early as they want or need.

Many of the organizations working with young people have come together to produce a forthcoming "Bold Vision" that puts together exactly this sort of agenda. Perhaps as significant as the program is the process: young leaders themselves were instrumental in determining what the policy package should contain. This will be an important blueprint for the post-COVID-19 era and on through the rest of this decade. Its goals are tied to the LA Olympic and Paralympic Games timeline, aspiring to leave another sort of dramatic and lasting mark on the region.

8 An eighth principle for a reinvented Los Angeles is to **strengthen the non-profit sector as a key part of civil society**. The non-profit sector plays a critical role in civic life, with organizations key to influencing public policy and promoting voter engagement.[78] Moreover, the government often relies on the non-profit sector to run a number of programs as these organizations are closest to communities. For instance, in response to the gap in federal assistance from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act for undocumented immigrants, California issued relief assistance for undocumented adults. To distribute the funds, the California Department of Social Services collaborated with 12 immigrant-serving non-profit organizations.

Even as non-profits are being asked to step up as both deliverers of services and advocates of justice, they are facing challenges in funding and flexibility. Key to their long-run sustainability is, unsurprisingly, dedicated funding and elimination of burdensome requirements that sometimes make it difficult for innovative grassroots organizations to secure government and foundation contracts – or to fulfill them when there are conflicting reporting requirements across entities. But beyond that, there are stresses unique to non-profits led by Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Angelenos.[79] Their staff may be particularly strained while simultaneously delivering needed services, operating under systems of oppression, and trying to alleviate the pressures of such systems. This means both internal and external work to address trauma and become more racially just. This important work takes time and may not conform to linear grant reports or contractual relationships with foundations.

How can philanthropy lead? Harmonizing funder standards could help to set a level for what public agencies can do – and government should surely follow to make it easier for their non-profit partners to focus on the work and not the paperwork. Ensuring that resources are sufficient to demands is critical. Philanthropy can also ensure adequate funding for organizations serving Native American communities throughout the county, a vulnerable group that often gets invisibilized due to relatively small numbers and lack of geographic concentration. Philanthropy should also be stressing that the non-profit sector is more than an expensive supplier of social welfare – it is both a generator of community power and an incubator of local community-based talent for future governance positions. Finally, it is important to remember that the sector is a jobs generator: one in 14 jobs in California is at a non-profit, so supporting them is supporting employment in a time when it is critically needed.[80]

9 Our ninth main principle is the need to **build community power and develop accompanying metrics to hold systems accountable**. Racial equity advocates will tell you that those who are closest to the problem are closest to the solution – but they are often furthest from the power needed to impact public policy. No amount of creative design by policy professionals can replace authentic, lived experience. Governments can make it easier for these voices to be heard through reinventing community engagement processes—that do more to lock out input then to weave it in—and such groups need philanthropic support to build collective voice and power to be heard when the reception is less than friendly.

Power-building organizations are, well, powerful. It is their work that has led to promises and actions to reduce police spending, prioritize Black lives, protect immigrants, reform bail, redirect education spending, clean up local environments, and so much more.[81] It is they that have forced the conversation around racial equity and done the long work to ensure that systems eventually begin to evolve. Supporting such movement building is critical: philanthropy should invest in it, government should listen to its concerns, and civil society will benefit from the accountability.

In the current moment, power-building organizations are particularly strained. Their bread-and-butter work is face-to-face organizing, which has all gone virtual. And, yet, it is they who boost turnout on the Census, who provide political education and get folks to the polls, and who organize protests against police brutality. All of these functions are being undermined by the pandemic and by the commander-in-chief who seems to have more interest in silencing civic conversation than learning from it. We need to support them to sustain civic life and make calls for racial equity real.

Another part of accountability is developing metrics that can measure progress on equity, particularly racial equity. There are numerous tools that are available: the Race Counts project launched by the Advancement Project, the National Equity Atlas and regional Equity Profiles offered by PolicyLink and the USC Equity Research Institute, the Human Development Index created by Measure of America, and the neighborhood level data offered by the USC Center for Social Innovation, and UCLA's Center for Neighborhood Knowledge.[82] The current efforts by both the City and County of Los Angeles to do a better job on measurement through an Office of Racial Equity and an annual State of Black Los Angeles report would benefit from intersecting with these existing efforts. And while public-private partnerships are good, evaluations of progress need to be independent of government – and the Committee for Greater LA should consider an annual report on its recommendations.[83]

It must also be noted that any recommendation for more metrics and data should also acknowledge the importance of inclusive data. It is impossible to have a conversation about equity without complete or inclusive data (both quantitative and qualitative). This can be seen in the conversation about COVID-19 testing, where many cases do not record race/ethnicity data, or in the erasure of certain communities in data for example the misclassification of Native Americans and the aggregation of Southeast Asians and Pacific Islanders within the larger Asian American diaspora. All these practices provide a disservice to communities most impacted by COVID-19 and make achieving equity

difficult.

10 Our final principle is the need to **align business, community, philanthropy, and government for equity**. Those that have been hurt by disadvantage are often the loudest in calling for equity and fairness but this is a call that must be taken up by all sectors. In regions across the country, places that have better growth and equity outcomes have generally developed leadership tables that bring together diverse constituencies (e.g., business leaders, civic leaders, and community leaders with connections across socio-economic groups and sectors), centralize knowledge and data, acknowledge common regional destinies and the legitimacy of others' viewpoints, and are action-oriented in pursuing multi-dimensional regional resilience.[84] Los Angeles has been characterized by fragmentation; we can no longer afford such an approach.

We also need to build more effective and more integrated governance structures. The lives of those living at the margins are affected by multiple systems, including policing, workforce development, education, housing, mental health, and so much more. But when it comes to addressing their lives, the governmental approach is often one of siloes. Agencies could better align – and also work to fill in local and state resources where federal dollars will not go (for example, in direct assistance to undocumented Angelenos). They could also address structural racism by adopting policies that account for and ensure equity in budgeting. Local and regional governments can embrace zero-based or equity budgeting in order to align expenditures with current priorities instead of historic priorities. That is, allocation of resources, at any level, should always consider the level of need, disproportionality, and disinvestment. This will require agencies to consider current and historic investments in communities and make informed allocations based on this data rather than on simple equal distribution of budgets across geographic or other delineations. If budgets do not reflect the agency's equity values and policies, those policies are simply scratching the surface.

> ***Other family members living in this household … have to commute to another County where there are different guidelines, for COVID.***
>
> ***- Focus Group Participant***

> ***"We're not going wait for the federal government to get it together. As California and as a region, we are acknowledging that there is this gap and that we are going to be very intentional to close that gap. We're establishing a statement, a purpose, that the disparities we're seeing among immigrant communities is not acceptable, and that we're going to fill in the investments necessary and [work on the] problematic infrastructure to reduce those disparities while the federal government figures it out. So, we're saying that this is a community that's part of the greater community, and even though federal funding may limit or prohibit certain immigrants of receiving support, that we're just going to have to make up that difference."***
>
> ***- Miguel Santana, Committee for Greater LA***

As mentioned earlier, another big step forward would be to create a County Office of Racial Equity to centralize best practices across county departments; to incentivize bold action plans and innovation; and to—where necessary—enforce accountability to racial equity goals. King County in the State of Washington was a first mover on this front and the City of Los Angeles is taking steps in this direction, recently naming a Chief Equity Officer.[85]

None of this is an easy charge. It will involve uncomfortable conversations between leaders and social sectors that are sometimes at odds. It will require accepting the accountability to equity goals that comes with measurement. It will necessitate being bold not just in our vision, but in our implementation. But the time to make such a change is now: the pandemic has revealed the consequences of refusing to invest in prosperity for all. The loss of life to disease, the threat of economic security due to recession, and the scars of racism that now stand out so clearly mean that local government, community-based organizations, philanthropic partners, and business associations must be more responsive, coordinated, and accountable.

Conclusion

Solidarity is not a matter of altruism. Solidarity comes from the inability to tolerate the affront to our own integrity of passive or active collaboration in the oppression of others, and from the deep recognition that, like it or not, our liberation is bound up with that of every other being on the planet, and that politically, spiritually, in our heart of hearts we know anything else is unaffordable.

- Aurora Levin Morales,
Medicine Stories: History, Culture, and the Politics of Integrity, p. 125

As COVID-19 continues to ravage the nation and the state, with pain and death ripping through communities with the fewest protections, it is easy to be pessimistic. Amidst the pressing crisis, dysfunction in D.C. is blocking leadership on public health and the federal aid that everyone needs to survive. Any sober analysis of where we are economically suggests that recovery will be slow, pain will be persistent, and income inequality is likely to grow. And while there is now a welcome consciousness of America's stark racial divides and the role of systemic racism in affecting outcomes across the board, the crisis has exacerbated disparities and left us with fewer resources to take bold action.

Yet there may also be reason for hope. The compounding crises of systemic racism, public underinvestment, and income inequality may have left us underprepared for this emergency but they also point to a way out: center racial equity, align our systems for change, and reconnect disparate actors in a conversation about our common future. Indeed, it is increasingly clear that the failure to act in solidarity with one another – to value Black lives, to treasure immigrant families, to declare homelessness unacceptable, to be willing to shoulder the burdens of mutual support – has left our whole region far more vulnerable than necessary. Our determination to work with each other – and to declare that there is no going back from what we have been and what we have realized about our failing systems – can be our way out.

A long list of specific steps that could remake our work and other systems is in the accompanying policy report, including proposals to improve housing, employment, health care, and support of the non-profit sector. But our main point here is that vulnerable, excluded, and oppressed communities can no longer be an afterthought as we move forward – and that this can benefit nearly everyone. Angela Glover Blackwell—founder of PolicyLink—uses the analogy of a curb cutout: curb cut-outs are essential for those using wheelchairs but they make the job of traversing streets better for everyone – mothers with strollers, little ones learning to walk, cyclists getting to work, and more.[86] By centering those with the highest needs, we actually improve life for all.

Even as we promote this commitment to equity and a spirit of renewed civic connection, we are not naïve. Today's inequalities are deeply entrenched and while nearly all of us will benefit from upturning decades of disadvantage and oppression, some will be threatened by the arrival of justice. Reparations cost money. The region, the state, and the nation will need to have a frank discussion of how to raise revenues, prompt business investments, drive dollars needed to close the digital divide, provide a path home to the incarcerated, promote dignified working conditions, lift up youth, provide a sense of security to immigrant Angelenos, and so much more.

Change is always bumpy – and frequently romanticized once a victory is achieved. The Civil Rights era had many inspiring speeches but also bloody marches, murders, and arrests. Securing a viable minimum wage involved not just academic research pointing to the benefits of lifting families from working poverty but also a struggle between community, labor, and business to work out the details. The health care system that imperfectly covers our population – but does so far better than a decade ago – resulted not just from well-reasoned policy papers but also from deep policy conflicts between political parties and ideological adherents.

Martin Luther King argued that, "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Often left out is that it is the hard work of every generation to do the bending. We are called now to deeply examine the root causes of our inequalities, to reject a "recovery" to a past that never really worked, and to embrace the path toward a future that can promise better for our region. We must provide a roadmap to a place we have never been before, a place of true equity and dignity for all. A greater LA – one that is equitable, inclusive, and free of structural racism – is possible but only if we work together to forge that future.

Endnotes

1 Data on total cases, deaths and age-adjusted disparities from http://dashboard.publichealth.lacounty.gov/covid19_surveillance_dashboard/ as of August 24, 2020. Age-adjustments are necessary for cross-group comparison because of higher vulnerabilities for the elderly and differences in the age distribution for different ethnic groups. A high-poverty neighborhood is defined as one where the area poverty exceeds twenty percent of the population; a low-poverty neighborhood is one where the area poverty rate is below ten percent. For a very high-poverty neighborhood (where the poverty rate is thirty percent or higher), the case rates is two and a half times higher.

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