

Tulane dean takes leading role in addressing racial disparities in COVID-19 deaths

|
Keith Brannon kbrannon@tulane.edu

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Dean Thomas LaVeist was recently appointed co-chair of the Louisiana COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force. Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano.

As a leading expert in issues of equity and health, Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine Dean Thomas LaVeist is playing a key role in addressing alarmingly high rates of COVID-19 cases and deaths among African Americans.

LaVeist was recently appointed co-chair of the [Louisiana COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force](#), which is tasked by Gov. John Bel Edwards to come up with a series of recommendations to address health inequities affecting communities that are most impacted by the coronavirus, to improve health outcomes and provide greater access to high quality medical care.

"Louisiana has for many years been among the least healthy states and the racial disparities seen around the country are as evident here as it is elsewhere," LaVeist said. "I am particularly delighted that Governor Edwards has prioritized health equity and I am hopeful that we will be able to make a difference for our state."

LaVeist has spoken extensively on the deep-seated reasons behind inequalities in the U.S. that lead African Americans to live sicker and die sooner than their peers. Living in one of COVID-19's epicenters, in New Orleans, he has a unique perspective from which to discuss this outbreak, what it means for African Americans, and what we should be doing now and in the future to address these issues and put an end to crippling inequities that have endured for generations.

African Americans across the country are dying of COVID-19 at rates of over twice their population size. For U.S. states that have released racial breakdowns of COVID-19 cases, early data shows that the mortality rate for African Americans is almost 3 times higher than for Asians, 2.7 times higher than whites and 2.5 times higher than for Hispanic/Latinos.

As of April 27, there have been more than 27,000 cases of COVID-19 in Louisiana and almost 1,700 deaths. More than 58% of those deaths were among African Americans, even though they represent only 32 percent of the population in the state.

The Louisiana COVID-19 Health Equity Task Force is co-chaired by Sandra Brown, dean of the Southern University's College of Nursing and Allied Health. The task force includes physicians, academic researchers, nurses, public officials and hospital administrators from across the state. It will initially focus on the following:

- Providing reliable and data driven information on COVID-19 safety and prevention;
- Providing the medical community with best practices and protocols for treating communities with underlying medical conditions and health disparities; and
- Ensuring testing availability and ease of access for all communities.

The panel, which will convene online here at 2 p.m. on May 1, will create a statewide Dashboard on Health Equity to measure its progress.

"I look forward to the mission of this task force and hope that our recovery moves us forward to a new normal where all Louisianans have an equitable access to a healthy and long life," LaVeist said.