



EDITORIAL

Public Health in 2020

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I would like to start as I usually do with a welcome to the latest issue of the *Ohio Journal of Public Health* (OJPH). Most papers in this issue were submitted to the Journal in December 2019, which seems like a lifetime ago. Can we remember December 2019? Back then, many of us had never heard of coronaviruses, much less the novel coronavirus that causes the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) ailment. The first reported cases in the United States were early in January 2020 and soon the disease became the focus of media attention. I taught *Introduction to Global Public Health* during spring semester and each week one of the students posted on a discussion board a public health news article to review in class. This activity started mid-January and *only* during the first week did a student chose an article *not* related to COVID-19. Back in January it was difficult to imagine that a few cases would lead to a worldwide pandemic. Yet here we are, 6 months later with no end in sight. Three op-ed pieces in this issue were submitted in response to COVID-19. Berman and colleagues wrote a highly informative piece that answers for a general audience many of the questions about what the government *can* do to regulate activity during a pandemic and about the balance between public health protections and individual rights. This excellent piece should be shared widely with our colleagues in schools and public health programs and with those working in public health practice. The second op-ed was written by current and former doctoral students at The Ohio State University (they make this teacher proud!). In this piece, Orellana and colleagues call for educators to use open access public health data produced in response to COVID-19 to teach students data analysis techniques, while reflecting on the ethics of collecting such data, and recognizing the limitations of open access data. Finally, in the third op-ed, Connell informs us of the vulnerable cancer patient population that was greatly affected in hospitals around Ohio. For numerous reasons, people with cancer were adversely impacted by COVID-19. Yet COVID-19 provides an incentive to strengthen infection-control measures in hospitals, which can hopefully help to prevent hospital-acquired infections in the future.

Two research articles in the current issue focus on breastfeeding among Ohio women. Knippen et al interviewed women who had gestational diabetes and examined breastfeeding duration and satisfaction. They report that mothers with gestational diabetes need more support to promote breastfeeding, support which could come in the form of education about the benefits and expectations of breastfeeding. In the second paper on breastfeeding, Furman et al reported results from the [Ohio First Steps for Healthy Babies](#) program administered by the Ohio Department of Health and the Ohio Hospital Association. They found that, overall, breastfeeding rates increased in Ohio between 2015 and 2018, with no difference between women who gave birth at hospitals that participated in the program and those that did not. However, when they examined data from the 17 hospitals that were the first to participate, greater engagement in the program was associated with significantly higher rates of breastfeeding. These promising results suggest that the program could have benefits for child health in the future.

The remaining 3 papers in this issue include a research brief by Vallabh et al about the dangers of e-cigarettes for children. Using national data, they found that most e-cigarette injuries that result in emergency department visits are due to ingestion of e-liquid or explosions. Tuiyott et al wrote a public



health practice paper that presents information about a web application designed to report overdose death data. Using the R Shiny package, a free statistical software environment, they created a data-visualization tool that presents Butler County overdose death data in various ways that are useful for public health practitioners. Finally, Kroustos and colleagues wrote a commentary about the benefits of horticulture therapy for adults with dementia. I encourage you to read the piece because they report that such therapy has benefits that can impact all of us through its ability to stimulate the senses, promote physical activity, and reduce stress. While we are physically distancing due to COVID-19, gardening is an activity that can be performed rather safely.

Most importantly, COVID-19 has underscored how intergenerational, structural racism is driving health inequities—including increased COVID-19 infections and deaths—among Black people in the United States.¹ Beyond COVID-19, the recent, brutal killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Rayshard Brooks, George Floyd, Tony McDade, Breonna Taylor, and too many others have sparked a national wave of outrage and calls for urgent action to address systematic racism as a driver of social and health inequities. Robert Jennings, President of the Ohio Public Health Association, stated: “The Ohio Public Health Association realizes there is plenty of work to do and asks all its partners to join forces in seeking equality and justice for all Ohioans. Let us together tear down the oppressive walls of institutional racism and begin building a better community where all have an equitable opportunity to freely breathe.”² To this end, cities and counties across Ohio have declared racism a public health crisis. The autumn issue of the *Ohio Journal of Public Health* will present research, public health practice, educational efforts, and policy approaches that address racism as a public health crisis in Ohio (please see the call for submissions on our website: <https://ohioph.org/ojph/>).

I once again thank the public health practitioners, researchers, and students who made important contributions in this latest issue of the Journal. I am also grateful to the members of the Editorial Board, which is comprised of public health leaders, scholars, educators, and students who are working tirelessly to make a difference in the lives of the millions of people who live in Ohio. Through this important work, we continue to promote the Ohio Public Health Association as the “voice” of public health in Ohio.

REFERENCES

1. Yearby R, Mohapatra S. Law, structural racism, and the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Law and the Biosciences*. doi:10.1093/jlb/ljaa036
2. OPHA statement on the death of George Floyd. Accessed June 23, 2020. <https://ohioph.org/opa-statement-on-the-death-of-george-floyd/>