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### **“We Need Health in All Policies”**

**October 30, 2020 (Omaha, NE)** – Inclusive Communities hosted Omaha Table Talk on Public Health and Race on Tuesday evening. The panel featured Dr. Athena Ramos, Assistant Professor at UNMC; Tasha Conley, Director of Nursing at One World Community Health Centers Inc.; and Kenny McMorris, CEO of Charles Drew Health Center Inc. Dr. Bradley Ekwerekwu, CEO of the Learning Community of Douglas and Sarpy County and an Inclusive Communities LeadDIVERSITY Alum moderated the discussion.

Panelists brought their wealth of expertise into the session which centered on the social determinants that impact health outcomes of minorities. Dr. Ramos noted “Race and health are intricately linked. Race and ethnicity are social determinants of health and so are where we live, learn, work, play and age.” She cited a study which mapped out life expectancy in Douglas County showing a 12-year disparity in life expectancy based on zip code.

Tasha Conley noted from her doctoral research and her long career in nursing, that there was a higher prevalence of conditions such as diabetes and obesity, maternal mortality and most recently COVID-19 among BIPOC patients. She particularly spoke of the importance of health literacy, and how this has erected barriers between some communities and positive experiences with healthcare providers and healthcare outcomes. With reference to the high incidence of COVID-19 cases among meatpacking plant workers who largely come from the Hispanic and immigrant population, she noted that the lack of language assistance and technological support affected not only their ability to get tested, but also their continuum of care.

Kenny McMorris highlighted the need to build trust between patients and their healthcare providers and institutions. He acknowledged that language assistance, transportation and trauma-informed care are all social elements that go beyond the medical realm but are increasingly important in promoting healthy communities. All panelists urged us to think of health as going beyond doctors, hospitals and clinics. They discussed the importance of access to healthy food, safe work environments, and access to healthcare – through both insurance and public infrastructure such as the locations of facilities and access to transport.

After breakout room discussions, the main takeaways were that the conversation about building equity in public health goes vastly beyond the healthcare system itself. Panelists urged participants to vote especially since local government policies have direct impacts on the health of our communities. They also called for greater self-advocacy and advocacy for others to improve interactions with the healthcare system individual by individual. Conley concluded the discussion with the message, “You don’t have to be in healthcare to make a difference in public health.”

The next Omaha Table Talk will take place on November 10, 2020 at 6:00pm (CST). The topic for discussion is Mass Incarceration Reform and features Dominique Morgan, Executive Director of Black and Pink, and Shakur Abdullah, Restorative Justice Trainer at the Community Justice Center. Registration for this event can be found here: <https://bit.ly/OTTNov10> ###