

Abstract

“together we can move mountains”: The ubuntu center on racism, global movements & population health equity at the dornsife school of public health at drexel university

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Background: The renewed attention on racism as a serious public health threat has increased the demand for academic institutions to provide dedicated spaces for rigorous, transdisciplinary research and bold collective action designed to dismantle racism and eliminate racial health inequities. While work documenting the health harms of racism is not new, the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on communities of color and the global protests against anti-Black, state-sanctioned violence that erupted in 2020 have forced the field to grapple with racism’s complexity, its varied and interconnected manifestations, and how it intersects with other systems of power and oppression to harm health and produce striking racial health inequities in the United States and around the world. The Ubuntu Center on Racism, Global Movements & Population Health Equity is a new center at the Dornsife School of Public Health at Drexel University established to provide institutional infrastructure for antiracism scholarship and action. The Ubuntu Center’s mission is to unite diverse partners to generate and translate evidence, accelerate antiracism solutions, and transform the health of communities locally, nationally, and globally.

Objectives: The purpose of this presentation is to discuss the development and application of “The Ubuntu Approach” a collective, human-centered approach to antiracism scholarship and action rooted in the South African principle, “Ubuntu... I am because we are,” as a central organizing tenet. Ubuntu reflects a commitment to honoring our shared humanity and connects our antiracism efforts to past and contemporary movements designed to bring about transformative change.

Methods: Through a collective process, we used antiracism frameworks and principles of community organizing to develop guiding principles that center and ground our work, core pillars that reflect our theory of change, and strategic focus areas that direct our internal and external activities. Together, these represent “The Ubuntu Approach” and have been used to develop processes, infrastructure, and strategic priorities for the center.

Results: Since our launch in 2021, we have engaged in strategic activities aligned with our approach. This includes the establishment of the Ubuntu Movement Fellows program designed to connect activism locally, nationally, and globally and an annual Teach-In series established to create a co-learning space for academics, community residents, and activists to deepen our shared understanding of structural racism and potential antiracism solutions.

Conclusion: Embracing a collective, human-centered approach that bridges relationships between the academy and activists embedded within local, national, and global movements can inform collective antiracism scholarship and action.

Advocacy for health and health education

