

RECOVERY

*The official newsletter of the
Fletcher Group Rural Center Of Excellence*



Building Rural Recovery Ecosystems

**ADDRESSING
DISPARITY**

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JUSTICE FOR ALL

An opioid epidemic. A Covid pandemic. And unprecedented social unrest. In moments like these we realize that America's story—our story—is still yet to be written.

Are we at an inflection point that will usher in lasting change? Or just a passing moment after which the status quo will be locked back into place?

There are two things we never allow ourselves to do at the Fletcher Group Rural Center of Excellence: To look away or to walk away.

There is immeasurable pain in the fact that "Justice For All" remains a work in progress. But our belief in a better world is undying.

In effort there is hope and in that effort we find our meaning.





RACIAL AND RURAL DISPARITIES ARE REAL

by *Founder and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ernie Fletcher*

Launched nearly 50 years ago, our nation's "War On Drugs" has long dictated a criminal justice approach to the use of illicit drugs. But Substance Use Disorders (SUD's) and the attending sequelae of drug overdose have only increased.

Studies indicate that the "Drug War" has also had a disproportionately harmful effect on Black Americans who are five times more likely to be incarcerated than White Americans.

Rural Challenges

Rural areas typically have lower access to healthcare than urban areas, but the situation is particularly acute for Black Americans incarcerated with an SUD. Only 20% of those living in rural areas receive any kind of drug treatment while imprisoned. And because their drug tolerance decreases while incarcerated, they run a high risk of fatal overdose when released.

Racial diversity is increasing rapidly in rural areas. So too are incarceration rates compared to those in more urban areas. A pooled analysis examining incarceration trends, for example, found that the estimated number of custodial inmates in rural areas increased by 27% (39,000 inmates) between 2013 and 2019 while the same population in urban areas decreased by 18% (36,200 inmates).

Another alarming statistic: During an 18-year span coinciding with the opioid epidemic, drug overdose mortality rates in rural areas increased by 400 percent.

Roughly one out of ten Americans live in rural communities, but 65 percent of all rural counties have been designated "health professional shortage areas." This makes issues associated with healthcare access and outcome disparities even more challenging for minority populations.

A Change In Awareness

Rather than locking up those with chronic Substance Use Disorders, the Fletcher Group Rural Center of Excellence works to develop "recovery ecosystems" where people can receive the treatment and services they need within a safe and nurturing environment. It's an approach that's resonating more and more with law enforcement and prison administrators, particularly those in rural areas who have been overwhelmed by our nation's substance use epidemic.

Informed taxpayers agree: addressing root-level social determinants and providing evidence-based treatment is not only more humane but also a much wiser investment.

Crises require us to act on the values we profess, such as empathy, communication, mutual respect, and cooperation. We are being called, each of us, into ever-widening circles of care where we can re-imagine our lives and our country in new ways.

More than anything else, our individual and collective fulfillment will depend on how we bring equity across racial and demographic disparities to help those in need.



INJUSTICE ANYWHERE THREATENS JUSTICE EVERYWHERE

by Fletcher Group CEO Dave Johnson

Sirens and explosions, fires burning, glass breaking, crowds chanting, As night falls, the sounds grows louder, closer, more ominous and unnerving.

With our home in a privileged section of the nation's capital suddenly surrounded by protesters, my wife and I are reminded that poverty and racism continue to prevent many Americans from living in a safe, just environment where they can protect and provide for loved ones.

A Dual Crisis

Meanwhile, with each passing day, it becomes more apparent that, although we're all susceptible to the health risks and economic devastation of COVID-19, some groups suffer more than others. As in other national crises—war, natural disaster, economic downturn—the pandemic is taking a disproportionately higher toll on the disempowered, especially people of color.

It comes as no surprise to my wife and I that the police killing of yet another black man brings people to the streets. Anger and outrage are the natural outcome when human rights and justice are denied. The protests require us to ask ourselves, "Who are we as a people? And as a nation? Where are we headed? and What is my part?"

The Fletcher Group is dedicated to protecting and bringing to those in recovery the resources they need to rebuild their lives, families, and communities. But while doing so, we must also be vigilant to listen and support each other. I hope that all those within our organization, as well those we work with, will feel free to share with us their frustrations and anguish as well as their hopes and inspiration.

We are never alone. Though the night may seem at times so dark that we cannot see, there are always guiding lights if we look for them.

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*We stand with
you!*”

In this moment of unrest and turmoil, I find my north star in the words of Dr. Martin Luther King in his "Letter from Birmingham," written in an Alabama jail in 1963:

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.”

To our team, our partners, our clients, and all those seeking a more just world: Take care and be safe. We stand with you.



THE RIGHT TO THRIVE

by Fletcher Group Research and Policy Assistant Grace Lamb

As the news and images of nationwide protests rivet our attention, it's a good time to listen and learn.

The protests remind us of the systemic inequalities rooted in racism. The lack of safe, nourishing environments where loved ones can be nourished and protected deprives many Black Americans of what I call the "Right To Thrive."

Racial and health disparities become more and more apparent as I work with those in recovery.

We know, for example, that mass incarceration has disproportionately impacted Black Americans and other minorities, with black males imprisoned at five times the rate of white males.

We know that although drug use crosses racial and socioeconomic lines, it has an outsized effect on people of color who find it difficult to obtain recovery services when addicted and legal counsel when arrested.

Although the Affordable Care Act of 2010 improved healthcare access and outcomes for many Black Americans, they and other minorities still receive lower-quality medical care.

Disparities are also evident in a wide variety of health conditions, including infant mortality, maternal mortality, heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

Minorities are also more likely to be uninsured than whites, a problem that's even more acute in rural areas.

As for economic inequality, it continues to persist with the 2018 median income for black households just 61 percent that of white households.

The legacy of "Redlining" is also undeniable, having left in its wake a lasting impact on education quality and generational wealth.

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*Make a career
of humanity.*”

Addressing the Youth March For Integrated Schools on April 18, 1959, Martin Luther King advised his young audience to, "Make a career of humanity. Commit yourself to the noble struggle for equal rights. You will make a greater person of yourself, a greater nation of your country and a finer world to live in."

I wasn't yet born when those words were spoken, but I find daily inspiration in them.

Thankfully, I work in an organization and a field dedicated to overcoming the gaps in opportunity that have prevented too many people from reaching their full potential.

Promoting equitable, effective Recovery Housing for those in need is my way of honoring Dr. King's vision of what America might still be.