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In Neighborhoods

BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

# Local leaders eager to combat institutional racism

BY NATASHA VON KAENEL

On Friday, Jan. 15, over 100 government workers from around Northern California met in Oakland to discuss new ways to combat institutional racism. The meeting was put on by the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), a national network of government committed to evaluating practices and programs to ensure that all people, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, are treated equally.

Combating institutional racism can seem like an impossible goal, where inequities hide behind bureaucratic language and tradition. But GARE's toolkit helps public employees see, for example, that small things like missed garbage pickups, inequitable distribution of community funds, or light bulbs not being changed frequently enough, all contribute to a larger problem of poor community health.

Francine Tournour, Director of the City of Sacramento's Office of Public Safety & Accountability, says that despite the challenges, the room was fired up, filled with an energy she says only comes around "every now and then."

"People think that just because it's not like it used to be, there aren't issues. But in fact there are," Tournour says.

**"I DON'T SEE HOW ANY GOVERNMENT AGENCY WOULDN'T GET INVOLVED IN SOMETHING LIKE THIS."**

*Francine Tournour, Director of the Office of Public Safety & Accountability*

Identifying and challenging inequities that come about through institutional practices is the focus of GARE's Racial Equity toolkit. Funded in part by The California Endowment's Building Healthy Communities initiative, GARE works with agencies to improve city and county services by including race and socioeconomic data when analyzing the success of government programs. By inserting this information into the agencies' analysis, cities have found that it becomes easier for government workers to identify the complex problems of institutional racism.



Susan McKee, Chief of Staff for County Supervisor Patrick Kennedy, left the meeting with hope that the toolkit would give all government workers a voice in fixing this systemic problem. "Giving the people who actually work in government the power to talk about changes that need to be made ... I think that's really important," she says.

Tournour agrees and hopes that the GARE toolkit will help the city tackle problems that have plagued Sacramento for years. "Immediately, homelessness comes to mind," she says. "GARE gives you studies that have taken place nationally, so we are not in a silo."

Symptoms of institutional racism can be big and ugly, like police brutality or unfair prison sentencing, but they can also be small, and easy to miss or dismiss.

"I don't see how any government agency wouldn't get involved in something like this," Tournour says. "And see how they can make themselves better accessible to a community who may not even know how to access some of their services."

Sacramento government workers, including Francine Tournour with the city's Office of Public Safety & Accountability, were among those who were part of a Government Alliance on Race and Equity cohort in Oakland on Jan. 15.  
Photo by Kate Holtzen

## BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In 2010, The California Endowment launched a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to improve the health of 14 challenged communities across the state. Over the 10 years, residents, community-based organizations and public institutions will work together to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges contributing to the poor health of their communities.

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Reach out to your local representatives and tell them you support their efforts to combat institutional racism and the implementation of GARE's toolkit in Sacramento.

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