



# DHS News

Newsletter of the Allegheny County  
Department of Human Services



**August 2019**

*The Office of Equity and Inclusion was established in fall 2018 to lead DHS in its efforts to reduce disproportionality and address disparities within our system. We will be focusing on this new office and its critical work in several upcoming issues of DHS News.*

## **Office of Equity and Inclusion works to improve outcomes for DHS clients**

The Office of Equity and Inclusion team consists of six full-time staff members who support equity and inclusion initiatives across the agency, including Immigrants and Internationals (I&I) and Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE). In addition to managing the existing efforts of these initiatives, the office is also charged with developing the department's first agency-wide equity plan. As an institution that not only values inclusion but also values data, the decision was made to focus on achieving racial equity.

"We made the decision to lead with race because race intersects with all other identities and people of color often have the worst outcomes. If we don't address racial inequity, we can't resolve any of the other disparities in our system," said Jessica Ruffin, senior leader for equity and inclusion.

Supported by the Government Alliance for Racial Equity (GARE), "a national network of government agencies working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all," the Equity and Inclusion team is preparing to take the first step in the planning process: a racial equity assessment that will be distributed electronically to all staff on October 1. The purpose of the assessment is to measure the knowledge, skills and experiences of DHS employees related to race and equity. While the assessment is designed to be completed anonymously, the results will provide a deeper understanding of DHS's capacity to advance racial equity from a programmatic level.

In addition to planning, the Office of Equity and Inclusion is available to support staff in all DHS offices in advancing equity with trainings, case consultations, resource development and special projects management.

"People come to DHS when they are vulnerable, and it's important that we are conscious about how we are creating spaces and supporting them," Jessica notes. "We've been having great conversations with – and tremendous buy-in from – DHS leadership, staff and outside stakeholders. With collaboration and planning, we can address client disparities to make sure that everyone, regardless of their social identity, has the best outcomes."

The Office of Equity and Inclusion is located at 810 River Avenue and can be reached at [dhs-equity@alleghenycounty.us](mailto:dhs-equity@alleghenycounty.us).