



INTRODUCTION

THE ERIE COUNTY OFFICE OF HEALTH EQUITY

The Erie County Office of Health Equity (ECOHE) was formed in compliance with the Erie County Health Equity Act of 2021 [1]. Under the law, the ECOHE is responsible for completing an annual report of the ECOHE's achievements, including but not limited to programs and services provided to advance health equity, disaggregated data on populations served and outcomes achieved, and the ECOHE's goals for the upcoming year. For more information on the Erie County Health Equity Act of 2021, see Appendix F.

The vision of the ECOHE is for all disadvantaged, marginalized, and diverse populations in Erie County to achieve maximum health and wellness. Existing data, including the findings described in this report, strongly indicate that inequities in health experiences and health outcomes occur among Erie County residents according to demographic factors. The root causes for these differences are historical, systemic, and largely ongoing. As a result, addressing these inequities requires intentional and targeted solutions.

The ECOHE's mission is to evaluate a wide variety of specific health outcomes among diverse populations to fully understand the depth and scope of health disparities in Erie County and to partner with community members, health care providers, faith and philanthropic leaders, and organizations to enact programs that help disadvantaged, marginalized and diverse populations in Erie County achieve maximum health and wellness. The ECOHE operates under the guidance of the Erie County Health Equity Advisory Board and in alignment with LiveWell Erie.

Health disparities and inequities in our community both prompted the creation of the ECOHE and provided evidence of the continued need for the office. It was as a result of the stark disparities in the impact of COVID-19 that the Erie County Health Equity Act of 2021 was written into law, founding the ECOHE. Recent tragedies that have befallen our community—like the racially motivated mass shooting at Tops Supermarket on May 14, 2022, and the December 2022 blizzard—highlighted the ways in which racism and the social determinants of health influence our safety and well-being. Achieving health equity means ensuring that who we are or where we live does not limit our ability to live a life of maximum health and wellness. The work of the ECOHE is needed now more than ever.

Within this report are summaries of all ECOHE programs and focus areas; sections exploring the data and findings of the ECOHE Community Survey and focus groups; and a discussion of recommendations, next steps, and future priorities of the ECOHE. The ECOHE recognizes the current limitations of identity-related terminology and the ongoing evolution of culturally sensitive terminology that aims to center the voices of the people described. A selection of Health Equity-related and identity-related terminology and definitions can be found in Appendix E.