ISSUE BRIEF

# The Work of Reckoning: Local Truth Commissions as a Public Health Strategy

## INTRODUCTION

Understanding local history and lived experience is essential to identifying the root causes of health and other inequities and informing efforts to address them. In recent years, several U.S. municipalities have established truth commissions to examine histories of racial injustice and structural inequality and to understand how these harms continue to shape residents' lives today.

This issue brief explores what local truth commissions are, how they are established and implemented, and their relevance to public health. Drawing on five municipal-led commissions, it examines common approaches, challenges, outcomes, and lessons for future truth-seeking efforts. Initial research for this issue brief was conducted for a local health department and a nonprofit organization participating in the Network's Racial Health Equity Legal and Policy Cohort (RHE Cohort) that were exploring policy options for establishing a local truth commission and reparations. We thank these partners for their valuable insights and contributions to this work.[1]

> FROM OUR PARTNER IN THE FIELD
>
> *"As a result of our participation in the RHE Cohort and the legal and policy technical assistance provided, we have begun implementing new strategies to lay the groundwork for establishing a local Commission on Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation. Specifically, we have shifted our focus toward building strong local partnerships and coalitions essential for advancing this work in today's challenging political climate. The technical assistance was instrumental in this process — real-world examples and guidance helped us identify actionable steps, refine our approach, and begin aligning our efforts with successful models from other communities."*

## WHAT ARE LOCAL TRUTH COMMISSIONS?

Truth commissions, sometimes referred to as truth and reconciliation commissions, are official, temporary, nonjudicial bodies that investigate injustice and issue recommendations for repair, reform, and accountability.[2] They are often associated with transitional justice, a global practice that begins with truth-seeking to help

societies address and remedy past wrongs stemming from mass atrocities, conflict, or gross human rights violations.[3] More than 40 countries have established truth commissions, including South Africa to address the legacy of apartheid, Canada to examine the harms of the Indian Residential School system, and Mauritius to investigate the lasting effects of slavery and indentured servitude.[4]

While the United States has not established national truth commissions to address its histories of slavery, colonialism, segregation, and oppression, several proposals have been introduced in Congress.[5] In the absence of a nationwide effort, truth-seeking initiatives addressing racial injustice have increasingly emerged at the state, local, and community levels, with a notable resurgence since 2020. A 2023 review identified nearly ninety truth commission and reparations initiatives proposed or underway across the United States, most at the local level.[6]

Among these local efforts, truth commissions are community-centered, government-authorized bodies that examine systemic injustices within a municipality, county, or region. They are created by a city or county council through a resolution or ordinance, or by executive order.[7] These time-limited bodies investigate and document harms against particular communities, facilitate truth-telling, and recommend actions to local decision-makers.[8] Their work typically combines fact-finding, historical research, community engagement, and testimony to understand the causes, impacts, and legacies of injustice.

Local truth commissions create opportunities for residents and communities affected by injustice to share their experiences and be heard, while encouraging broader community participation through listening, learning, and dialogue. Through these efforts, commissions contribute to a more complete understanding of local history, recognition of past and ongoing harms, and the development of recommendations to advance accountability, repair, healing, and institutional reform.

These efforts are directly relevant to public health. Many of the conditions that drive health inequities today trace back to local government decisions about housing, land use, policing, education, and public investment.[9] Truth commissions offer a structured way to publicly document those harms, including harms to health that might otherwise go unrecognized. They can also generate recommendations that health departments and their partners can act on.

Truth commissions share a common purpose and general structure, but their mandates, membership, activities, and recommendations vary considerably across jurisdictions. This brief focuses on commissions established by municipal governments to address racism and racial injustice.[10]

## ESTABLISHMENT AND DESIGN

Truth commissions are shaped by their community's history, culture, politics, needs, and priorities. No two efforts are the same, and a process designed and implemented in one jurisdiction may not work in another. Yet these commissions are typically sparked by a confluence of factors, including community organizing, specific

incidents, national movements, and leaders willing to champion the work.[11] They are both flexible and vulnerable, able to adapt to community needs but also subject to shifts in political will and limited resources.[12]

A truth commission requires a legal and institutional foundation that gives it authority to act and signals the government's commitment to a truth and reconciliation process. Once sufficient political will exists, a commission may be established through a statute or ordinance, a resolution, an executive order, or other formal action, depending on the level of government. These enabling documents typically address a set of core elements, outlined in the table below.[13] Understanding these elements is essential for designing, evaluating, and strengthening commissions.

### CORE LEGAL ELEMENTS OF TRUTH COMMISSIONS

| Element | Description |
|---|---|
| Preamble | Provides background information, historical context, and relevant data, often in introductory "whereas" clauses. Explains the rationale for the commission's creation and often acknowledges past harms or inequities. |
| Mandate | Defines the scope of the commission's inquiry, including the specific issues, time period, communities, and institutions to be examined. |
| Commissioners and Staff | Specifies the number of commissioners and staff, along with the criteria and process for their appointment. |
| Duration | Establishes the period during which the commission is authorized to conduct its work, including deadlines for interim updates and submission of the final report, and any process for extensions. |
| Functions | Describes what the commission is expected to do to achieve its objectives and the specific actions used to carry out this work. |
| Operations and Resources | Outlines the organizational structure, staffing, facilities, administrative support, community partnerships, and financial resources needed to carry out the commission's mandate. |
| Powers | Specifies the commission's formal authority, such as requesting records and information from government agencies, holding public hearings, and protecting the confidentiality of participants. |
| Final Report | Establishes requirements for the report's structure and content, including findings, recommendations, and procedures for its submission to the governing body. |

The process of designing a truth commission involves considering and defining key components in the enabling documents. These choices can shape a commission's effectiveness, credibility, and ability to achieve its intended outcomes.

## COMMISSION ACTIVITIES

With this foundation in place, commissions generally carry out their work through five main functions:[14]

- **Fact-finding** – Collecting evidence through records review, historical research, testimony collection, interviews, site visits, and data analysis to establish a shared account of historical and contemporary harms and their ongoing impacts.
- **Truth-telling** – Creating opportunities for residents to share their stories and experiences through testimony, listening sessions, public hearings, and other community forums.
- **Public engagement and education** – Building awareness of the commission's work and encouraging participation through outreach, education, media engagement, and partnerships.
- **Community dialogue and healing** – Creating opportunities for reflection, relationship-building, restorative practices, and community healing activities.
- **Final report and recommendations** – Synthesizing evidence, documenting findings, and developing recommendations intended to inform policy, institutional, and reparative action.

Some commissions rely on outside consultants, facilitators, researchers, or subject-matter experts to support portions of this work, particularly community engagement, facilitation, and preparation of the final report.[15] Throughout the process, commissioners and staff often work in partnership with local organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders rather than conducting the work in isolation.

## FINAL REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A commission's final report presents its findings and recommendations to government leaders and the broader community. Findings may draw on testimony, research, records review, and other evidence-gathering efforts to document the harms, disparities, and patterns of injustice identified during the commission's work, as well as the strength and resilience of affected communities. Recommendations may include policy reforms, institutional changes, and reparative measures directed at governments, public institutions, and community organizations.[16] Some reports pair each recommendation with responsible partners, performance measures, intended outcomes, or timelines to support implementation.[17]

The final report ends a commission's formal work, but its impact depends on what comes next: whether local leaders adopt, fund, and carry out its recommendations.

## MUNICIPAL-LED TRUTH COMMISSIONS IN THE UNITED STATES

This table summarizes five truth commissions established by U.S. municipalities to examine and address racism and racial injustice.[18] For each, it highlights the commission's public health relevance and lists key source materials, illustrating how local truth commissions can help advance health equity.

| COMMISSION | DURATION[19] | MANDATE | PUBLIC HEALTH RELEVANCE | KEY DOCUMENTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Carlisle Borough Truth and Reconciliation Commission** *(Carlisle, PA)* | May 2021-Dec. 2022 | Investigate systemic racism in the Borough and recommend actions to promote racial justice and equity. | Public health was a designated focus area. Recommendations included public health listening sessions ("Health Hearings"), monitoring environmental health concerns tied to the Borough's industrial history, partnering with local health organizations to improve data collection and services, and supporting public health education through a "Community Reads" book club.[20] | Resolution No. 03-11-2021-01 (Mar. 2021) *(establishing the commission and defining its mandate)*<br>TRC Bylaws (effective Aug. 2021) *(governance structure and operating procedures).*<br>TRC Action Plan (Sept. 2021) (*guiding research, community engagement, and commission activities)*<br>Report and Recommendations (Dec. 2022) (*findings and recommendations to Borough Council*) |
| **Charleston Special Commission on Equity, Inclusion, and Racial Conciliation** *(Charleston, SC)* | June 2020-Aug. 2021 | Review city policies, practices, budgets, and systems related to racial inequities and recommend reforms. | The enabling ordinance authorized subcommittees on topics including health care, and the commission created a Health Disparities and Environmental Justice subcommittee.[21] Recommendations included adopting a Health and Equity in All Policies approach and national standards for culturally and linguistically appropriate services (CLAS), addressing the social determinants of health to improve life expectancy in "minority" and underserved communities, expanding access to subsidized health care and mental health resources, supporting COVID-19 testing and vaccination, and prioritizing flood mitigation and climate strategies that address racial equity.[22] | Ordinance 2020-081 (June 2020) *(establishing the special commission)*<br>SCEIRC Framework Document (Aug. 2020) *(guiding commission structure, focus areas, and activities)*<br>Report and Recommendations (Aug. 2021) *(findings and recommendations for City Council)* |
| **Iowa City Ad Hoc Truth and Reconciliation Commission** *(Iowa City, IA)* | Nov. 2020-Dec. 2024 | Examine systemic racism and discrimination, carry out restorative justice, and recommend institutional and policy reforms. | Health was not a designated focus area, but community testimony raised barriers to mental health care, including cost and a lack of culturally competent providers, and unequal access to COVID-19 testing and vaccines.[23] This testimony shaped the commission's recommendations, which called for a city-funded program offering free therapy and support groups for people affected by racial injustice.[24] | Resolution No. 20-228 (Sept. 2020) (establishing the commission and defining its mandate)<br>Resolution No. 23-278 (Oct. 2023) (adopting bylaws and governance procedures)<br>Final Report (Apr. 2024) (documenting community engagement, fact-finding, and commission activities)<br>Concluding Report (Mar. 2025) (findings, recommendations, and implementation framework) |
| **Salisbury Truth, Racial, Unity, Transformation and Healing** | Aug. 2023-Present | Advise the Mayor on racial injustice, recommend policy and | The enabling resolution lists "access to health" among the areas in which harms from historical and systemic racism | Resolution No. 3147 (Jan. 2022) (establishing the committee and defining its responsibilities) |

| COMMISSION | DURATION[19] | MANDATE | PUBLIC HEALTH RELEVANCE | KEY DOCUMENTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Advisory Committee** *(Salisbury, MD)* | | community engagement strategies, and support racial healing efforts. | should be documented, and names health programs as potential community engagement partners.[25] Because the committee's work is ongoing, it has not yet issued a final report. | TRUTH Advisory Committee Webpage (2026) (committee overview, membership, meeting records, and public participation information) |
| **Williamsburg Truth and Reconciliation Committee** *(Williamsburg, VA)* | Sept. 2021-June 2023 | Examine the historical and contemporary impacts of racism and present findings and recommendations to City Council. | Health was not named in the committee's charge, but community interviews surfaced barriers to care.[26] Recommendations called for creating and supporting a healthy community through expanded mental and social health services and partnerships with local health providers. The committee also proposed an in-depth study of race-based discrimination across sectors, including health care.[27] | Governance Memo (June 2021) (committee structure, scope, and operating framework)<br>Resolution No. 21-05 (July 2021) (directing the City Manager to establish the committee)<br>Final Report (July 2023) (findings and recommendations to City Council) |

## LESSONS FOR FUTURE TRUTH-SEEKING EFFORTS

The commissions varied in their mandates, structures, resources, and local contexts, but their experiences show that truth-seeking is both an institutional undertaking and a community process. Across the board, mandate, scope, governance, and community engagement shaped each commission's ability to build trust, develop credible findings, and support meaningful action. The themes below may help communities design more effective truth-seeking efforts.

### Health and Health Equity Emerged Across Commissions

Health-related issues emerged in every commission that completed its work, including those that did not name health as a formal area of inquiry. Some commissions explicitly examined health disparities and the social determinants of health. In others, concerns about health care access, mental health, trauma, and discrimination in health care were raised through community testimony and truth-telling activities and shaped final recommendations.[28] Some commissions also linked racial healing to mental health, recommending trauma-informed approaches across schools, first responders, and health care.[29]These experiences show how closely racial injustice and health inequities are connected, and that truth-seeking can surface health-related harms that might otherwise go undocumented. For health departments, this suggests value in engaging early by helping shape a commission's mandate to include health impacts and by offering data that can help contextualize community testimony.[30]

**Broad Mandates Can Create Challenges**

All of the commissions reviewed were given broad mandates to address racism and advance racial equity in their communities, and most emerged from the 2020 racial justice movement.[31] While these broad mandates reflected the complex nature of racial inequities, they also created challenges for commissions operating within limited timeframes and resources.[32] Some commissions responded by organizing their work into defined focus areas or narrowing their priorities.[33] This challenge is reflected in truth commission practice more broadly, where decisions about scope must be balanced with available time, resources, and support.[34]

**Governance and Institutional Support Matter**

Across the commissions reviewed, governance-related challenges affected how effectively commissions could carry out their work. These challenges included uncertainty regarding decision-making authority and implementation processes, turnover among commissioners, and changes in institutional or political support over time. [35] In some cases, these issues delayed commission activities, disrupted continuity, or contributed to differing expectations among commissioners, community members, and government officials regarding the commission's role, resources, and ability to effect change.[36]

**Community Engagement Is Essential but Challenging**

Community engagement was a core component of each commission reviewed. Several commissions emerged directly from community advocacy, and community members were appointed as commissioners to help guide the truth-seeking process.[37] Commissions used testimony, outreach, community conversations, healing circles, and other engagement activities to hear from residents affected by racial injustice, to inform their work, and to promote racial healing. [38] These efforts also helped document the impacts of racial injustice across policing, housing, employment, education, health care, and local government, providing commissions with firsthand accounts of discrimination, inequitable treatment, and harms that contributed to distrust of public institutions.[39] These accounts also surfaced health inequities that commissions had not initially set out to examine.[40]

Commissions often struggled to engage the individuals and communities they most hoped to reach and to create spaces where participants felt comfortable speaking openly. In some communities, skepticism rooted in past unfulfilled commitments made engagement difficult from the start.[41] These experiences suggest that meaningful community engagement requires more than opportunities for participation. It also requires approaches that build trust, create welcoming spaces for dialogue, and provide multiple avenues for community members to share their experiences. This can include establishing partnerships with trusted organizations that can help collect and elevate community stories.[42]

**Implementation Determines Impact**

A commission's final report is often the beginning, rather than the end, of the truth-seeking process. Across the cases reviewed, recommendations received varying levels of attention and support from local leaders after reports were issued.[43] In some municipalities, recommendations contributed to tangible outcomes or ongoing implementation efforts, including scholarship programs and continued truth and reconciliation activities. [44] In others, recommendations remained under consideration or required additional action and sustained commitment before meaningful implementation could occur. [45]

Follow-through matters because of what commissions ask of communities. Truth-telling asks residents to revisit painful experiences, raising expectations that their testimony will lead to change. When recommendations go unimplemented, residents may see the process as another unfulfilled promise, deepening distrust of local government and making future engagement harder.[46] A commission's impact therefore depends not only on its findings and recommendations but also on the political will, resources, and accountability mechanisms available to support implementation.

## CONCLUSION

Racial injustice is a public health crisis with wide-ranging effects on physical, mental, and community well-being. Exposure to racism is linked to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).[47] Because of past and ongoing harm, many people affected by racial injustice avoid or delay health care, deepening disparities in access and outcomes.[48]

Local governments have played a significant role in creating and perpetuating these conditions across generations. Through deliberate decisions related to housing, land use, policing, education, transportation, and public investment, municipal and county governments produced inequities whose consequences persist in the health disparities we see today.[49] Addressing these harms is both a government responsibility and a public health imperative.

Truth commissions and other truth-seeking initiatives provide communities with a structured process for examining historical harms, elevating community experiences, developing a shared understanding of the past, and identifying opportunities for reform and repair. Realizing that potential requires follow-through. Public health agencies are well positioned to support truth-seeking efforts by sharing community health data, supporting community engagement activities, examining their own policies and practices, and helping translate commission findings into policies, programs, and accountability measures that advance health equity.

Those considering truth-seeking efforts should ask several questions early on: Is there sufficient community trust and political commitment to support the process? Are institutions prepared to examine their role in creating or perpetuating inequities? And is there a willingness to act on the lessons, findings, and recommendations that emerge? While there is no single formula for truth-seeking, the experiences of the commissions reviewed in this brief suggest that a clear purpose, meaningful community engagement with a

willingness to adapt, adequate resources, transparent governance, and sustained commitment to implementation are essential for success.

The work is urgent, and communities do not have to start from scratch. Existing frameworks, lessons from local commissions, and a growing body of truth-seeking practice provide valuable guidance for those considering these efforts.[50] While truth-telling alone cannot remedy generations of inequity, it remains a critical first step toward accountability, repair, and healthier communities. As Jamila M. Porter and Aysha Dominguez Pamukcu write in *Advancing Equity and Justice* (APHA Press, 2025), "Health inequities are the living legacies of stolen land, stolen labor, and stolen lives . . . Truth-telling is the first act of redress. It creates the foundation for accountability, trust, and collective action, all of which are vital to advance public health and movements for justice."[51]

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[1] ONE LOVE GLOBAL, *2022-2026 Impact Report*, p. 24 (2026), https://111e4c1c-fc20-408e-82ff-85a5e736bddf.filesusr.com/ugd/0a7010_08eacee3846749738e6e0a3d9019323b.pdf#page=24.

[2] *Adapted from* INT'L CTR. FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE, *Truth, Reconciliation, and Redress for Racial Injustice in the United States: Insights from Experiences of Commissions Around the World*, p. 7 (Dec. 2022), https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/ictj_report_us_racial-truth_web_0.pdf; Eduardo González & Howard Varney eds., *Truth Seeking: Elements of Creating an Effective Truth Commission*, INT'L CTR. FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE, ch. 2, p. 9 (2013), https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Book-Truth-Seeking-2013-English.pdf.

[3] *What Is Transitional Justice?*, INT'L CTR. FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE, (last visited Sept. 4, 2026), https://www.ictj.org/what-transitional-justice (defining transitional justice).

[4] Lisa Rathke, *Vermont Creates a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to Examine State's Eugenics History,* AP NEWS, (Apr. 23, 2023), https://apnews.com/article/truth-reconciliation-commission-vermont-eugenics-55ae8aca3b7a9e0ab6759c1173119cae (quoting Virginie Ladisch, Int'l Ctr. for Transitional Justice); *South African Truth and Reconciliation* Commission, S. AFR. DEP'T OF JUST, https://www.justice.gov.za/TRC/index.html; *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, NAT'L CTR. FOR TRUTH & RECONCILIATION, https://nctr.ca/about/truth-and-reconciliation-

commission-of-canada/ ; M*auritius Truth and Justice Commission*, AFR. TRANSITIONAL JUST. HUB, https://atjhub.csvr.org.za/mauritius-truth-and-justice-commission-2009-2011/.

[5] *Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Commission*, S. Con. Res. 14, 119th Cong. (2025), https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-concurrent-resolution/14/text (proposing a national Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Commission); *Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act*, S. 761, 119th Cong. (2025), https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/senate-bill/761 (proposing a federal commission to investigate and document the history and impacts of Indian Boarding School policies); *Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act*, H.R. 40, 119th Cong. (2025), https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/40 (proposing a federal commission to study the legacy of slavery and recommend reparative measures).

[6] HOWARD UNIV. SCH. OF L., *Transitional Justice Report*, p. vi, ix (Darin E.W. Johnson ed., May 2023), https://thurgoodmarshallcenter.howard.edu/sites/tmcrc.howard.edu/files/2023-09/HUSL_Transitional%20Justice%20Report_Johnson_Final_May%202023.pdf.

[7] *See* HOWARD UNIV. SCH. OF L., *supra* note 5, at p. 6-13 (describing municipal truth commissions and how each was established); *see, e.g.*, Iowa City, Iowa, Res. No. 20-228 (Sept. 15, 2020), https://www.iowa-city.org/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=2036443&dbid=0&repo=CityofIowaCity; Charleston, S.C., Ordinance 2020-081 (June 23, 2020), https://www.charleston-sc.gov/DocumentCenter/View/27322/Ordinance-Establishing-the-Special-Commission-on-Equity-Inclusion-and-Racial-Conciliation; Providence, R.I., Exec. Order 2020-13 (July 15, 2020), https://www.providenceri.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Mayors-Executive-Order-2020-13-1.pdf.

[8] HOWARD UNIV. SCH. OF L., *supra* note 5, at p. viii.

[9] NAT'L ACADS. OF SCIS., ENG'G & MED., *Communities in Action: Pathways to Health Equity*, ch. 3 (Alina Baciu et al. eds., 2017), https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK425845/.

[10] This brief uses terms as they appear in the commissions' enabling documents and reports. Although international transitional justice frameworks often refer to those harmed as "victims," the commissions reviewed here generally framed their work around residents and communities affected by racial injustice.

[11] HOWARD UNIV. SCH. OF L., *supra* note 5, at p. viii-ix; *see, e.g.*, Riley Davis, *Iowa City City Council Discusses Iowa Freedom Riders' Demands for Policy Change*, DAILY IOWAN (June 9, 2020), https://dailyiowan.com/2020/06/09/iowa-city-city-council-discusses-iowa-freedom-riders-demands-for-policy-change/.

[12] Emma Bakkum, *Speaker's Notes: Truth Commissions*, PUB. INT'L L. & POL'Y GRP. (2024), https://static1.squarespace.com/static/645417eccab89a77aae9c71c/t/65f38301fa146153c0abdef5/1710457601720/Truth+Commissions.pdf.

[13] *Adapted from* Eduardo González, *Drafting a Truth Commission Mandate: A Practical Tool*, INT'L CTR. FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE, p. 5–20 (June 2013), https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-Report-DraftingMandate-Truth-Commission-2013_0.pdf; Bakkum, *supra* note 11.

[14] *Adapted from* González & Varney, *supra* note 1, at p. 23-24; González, *supra* note 12, at p. 7; Bakkum, *supra* note 11.

[15] *See, e.g.*, Native Partners, Healing Partners, Kearns & West, et al., *Final Report*, IOWA CITY TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM'N (Apr. 2024), https://www.iowa-city.org/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=2199570&dbid=0&repo=CityofIowaCity; Frankline Matanji, *Concluding Report*, IOWA CITY AD HOC TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM'N (Mar. 2025), https://www.icgov.org/government/boards-commissions-and-committees/ad-hoc-truth-and-reconciliation-commission.

[16] *See, e.g.,* CARLISLE BOROUGH TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM'N, *Recommendations to the Carlisle Borough Council*, p. 4–6 (Dec. 2022), https://cms8.revize.com/revize/carlislepa/Government/boards/TRC/TRC%20Report%20to%20Borough%20Council.pdf?t=20230214100149O (presenting recommendations to Borough Council across seven focus areas, including public health); Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 96-99 (recommending restorative justice programs, mental health services, and housing and policing reforms directed at the City, school district, university, and community).

[17] *See, e.g.*, CHARLESTON SPECIAL COMM'N ON EQUITY, INCLUSION & RACIAL CONCILIATION, *Report and Recommendations*, p. 18–54 (Aug. 2021), https://www.charleston-sc.gov/DocumentCenter/View/34391 (assigning lead staff, oversight, performance measures, and due dates for each action); Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 9 (pairing each recommendation with a responsible partner, metrics, and timelines); WILLIAMSBURG TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM., *Truth and Reconciliation Committee Report*, p. 6–18 (July 2023), https://williamsburg.civicweb.net/document/56612/Presentation%20of%20the%20Truth%20and%20Reconciliation%20Co.pdf (identifying partner agencies and intended outcomes for each recommendation).

[18] Author's review, as of August 2026, of municipal truth and reconciliation bodies established by council resolution or ordinance to address racism and racial injustice. Concluded bodies were included only if they issued a complete final report. Efforts created by executive order, bodies charged with studying or planning a future process, and reparations-focused commissions or task forces were excluded. This review is not comprehensive.

[19] Duration reflects each commission's period of active operation, beginning when commissioners were appointed or first convened and ending at the conclusion of its work. Dates of enabling documents are listed under Key Documents.
[20] CARLISLE BOROUGH TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM'N, supra note 15, at p. 13–14.
[21] Charleston, S.C., Ordinance 2020-081, *supra* note 6, § 2-209(c) (authorizing subcommittees on matters including health care); CHARLESTON SPECIAL COMM'N, *supra* note 16, at p. 4 (listing the commission's subcommittees).
[22] CHARLESTON SPECIAL COMM'N, *supra* note 16, at p. 13, 31–33.
[23] Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 87, 91–92 (summarizing testimony on barriers to culturally competent mental health care and unequal access to COVID-19 testing and vaccines).
[24] Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 9, 95, 97–98 (describing the commission's support for testimony calling for free or subsidized mental health services, and recommending a city-funded program offering free therapy and support groups).
[25] Salisbury, Md., Res. No. 3147, § 3(a), (f) (Jan. 18, 2022), https://salisbury.md/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Res-3147-Enabling-Legislation.pdf (defining "truth" to include documentation of harms in areas such as "access to health" and listing health programs among potential community engagement partners).
[26] Andrew O. Trivette, *Truth and Reconciliation Committee Governance*, CITY OF WILLIAMSBURG, § (4) (June 22, 2021), https://williamsburgva.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3157/Truth-and-Reconciliation-Governance-Memo; WILLIAMSBURG TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM., *supra* note 16, at p. 5 (describing community interviews in which residents cited barriers to accessing health care).
[27] WILLIAMSBURG TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM., *supra* note 16, at p. 12–15.
[28] *See, e.g.*, Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 87, 91–92, 97–98 (summarizing testimony on barriers to culturally competent mental health care, unequal access to COVID-19 testing and vaccines, and dismissal of concerns by health care providers, and recommending a city-funded program offering free therapy and support groups); WILLIAMSBURG TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM., *supra* note 16, at p. 5, 12–13 (describing community interviews in which residents cited barriers to accessing health care, and recommending partnerships with local health organizations and mental health providers).
[29] *See, e.g.*, WILLIAMSBURG TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM., *supra* note 16, at p. 12–13 (recommending trauma-informed and restorative approaches among teachers, first responders, and medical providers).
[30] *See, e.g.*, CARLISLE BOROUGH TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM'N, supra note 15, at p. 13–14 (noting the commission lacked capacity to collect health-specific data and recommending partnerships with local health agencies to do so).
[31] HOWARD UNIV. SCH. OF L., *supra* note 5, at p. ix; *See, e.g.,* Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 115 (describing the commission's formation following local protests after George Floyd's murder in 2020).
[32] *See, e.g.*, Trivette, *supra* note 25, § (4)(c) (requiring findings and recommendations by the City Council's June 2022 meeting); *Williamsburg Truth and Reconciliation Committee to Continue Work for Another Year*, WYDAILY (June 20, 2022), https://wydaily.com/latest/local/2022/06/20/williamsburg-truth-and-reconciliation-committee-to-continue-work-for-another-year/ (reporting the committee's extension through June 2023); Isabelle Foland & Sydney Libert, *IC Truth and Reconciliation Commission Receives Funding, Timeline Extension*, DAILY IOWAN (May 3, 2023), https://dailyiowan.com/2023/05/03/ic-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-receives-funding-timeline-extension/ (reporting council's approval of an 18-month extension because the commission needed more time to complete its work); CHARLESTON SPECIAL COMM'N, *supra* note 16, at p. 4-5 (noting the commission's initial 90-day deadline was extended to allow more time for recommendations).
[33] *See, e.g.*, CARLISLE BOROUGH TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM'N, supra note 15, at p. 2 (organizing its work into seven themes, including Public Health, researched in sequence); CHARLESTON SPECIAL COMM'N, *supra* note 16, at p. 4 (organizing the commission's work into seven subcommittees); Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 37–38 (narrowing fact-finding from about seven topics to three because of time and resource constraints).
[34] INT'L CTR. FOR TRANSITIONAL JUSTICE, *Truth, Reconciliation, and Redress for Racial Injustice in the United States, supra* note 1, at p. 19.
[35] SALISBURY TRUTH ADVISORY COMM., *Meeting Minutes* (Apr. 15, 2026), https://salisbury.md/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/MEETING-MINUTES_-TRUTH-Committee-041526.pdf (discussing disputes regarding approval processes, decision-making authority, and the pathway for advancing recommendations to elected officials); Kate Payne, *Iowa City Temporarily Suspends Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Following a String of Resignations*, IOWA PUB. RADIO (Mar. 17, 2021), https://www.iowapublicradio.org/racial-justice/2021-03-17/iowa-city-temporarily-suspends-truth-and-reconciliation-commission-following-a-string-of-resignations; CARLISLE BOROUGH TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM'N, supra note 15, at p. 2 (describing commissioner attrition and member availability as factors that impeded the commission's momentum); Heath Ellison, *City Council Votes to Not Receive Report on Racial Equity*, ABC NEWS 4 (Aug. 17, 2021), https://abcnews4.com/news/local/city-council-equity; Mattijs van Maasakkers & Ben Wilson, *Truth and Reconciliation for Racial Equity: Case Studies and Early Reactions from an Interdisciplinary Research Team*, 112 NAT'L CIVIC REV., no. 4 (Winter 2024), https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/ncr-article/truth-and-reconciliation-for-racial-equity-case-studies-and-early-

reactions-from-an-interdisciplinary-research-team/ (noting that political opposition, council turnover, and shifting support affected the reception and advancement of the Charleston commission's recommendations).

[36] Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 20–21, 104–107 (discussing delays arising from bureaucratic processes and structural constraints, including the hiring of external facilitators, and describing misaligned expectations among commissioners, city officials, and community members regarding the commission's authority, resources, and implementation capacity).

[37] *See, e.g.,* Iowa City, Iowa, Res. No. 20-228, pmbl., § 2 (Sept. 15, 2020), https://www.iowa-city.org/WebLink/DocView.aspx?id=2036443&dbid=0&repo=CityofIowaCity (citing calls for action from protesters and residents, and providing for representation from groups including the Iowa Freedom Riders); *Truth and Reconciliation Commission,* CARLISLE BOROUGH (last visited Oct. 19, 2026), https://www.carlislepa.org/government/boards_commissions/truth_reconciliation_commission.php (noting the commission grew out of a January 2021 community town hall on racial equity attended by more than 100 residents).

[38] *See, e.g.*, CARLISLE BOROUGH TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM'N, supra note 15, at p. 9–10 (describing outreach at existing public events and a "Thinking About Race Thursdays" dialogue series); Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 27–29 (describing public hearings, interviews, talking and healing circles, focus groups, and community events); WILLIAMSBURG TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM., *supra* note 16, at p. 15 (proposing a monthly series of public seminars and dialogues on healing).

[39] Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 76–84, 105 (summarizing community testimony regarding policing, employment, housing, education, health care, institutional distrust, and the role of truth-telling in informing commission findings).

[40] *See, e.g.*, Matanji, *supra* note 14, p. 87, 91–92 (summarizing testimony on barriers to mental health care and unequal access to COVID-19 testing and vaccines); WILLIAMSBURG TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM., *supra* note 16, at p. 5 (describing community interviews in which residents cited barriers to accessing health care).

[41] CARLISLE BOROUGH TRUTH & RECONCILIATION COMM'N, supra note 15, at p. 9–10 (noting lower-than-expected participation by residents of color and challenges engaging intended audiences); Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 33, 104, 107 (describing the importance of creating spaces where community members felt comfortable speaking openly, and noting community skepticism rooted in past racial justice efforts and residents' fear of backlash for participating in truth-telling sessions).

[42] *See, e.g.*, *MN Truth Council*, THE ADVOCATES FOR HUM. RTS., (last visited Oct. 14, 2026) https://www.theadvocatesforhumanrights.org/MNTruthCouncil (describing the collection of community stories and testimony through a partnership between the Council and The Advocates for Human Rights).

[43] *Compare* Heath Ellison, *City Council Votes to Not Receive Report on Racial Equity*, ABC NEWS 4 (Aug. 17, 2021), https://abcnews4.com/news/local/city-council-equity (reporting the Charleston City Council's vote not to receive the commission's report), *with* CARLISLE BOROUGH, *supra* note 36.
(noting Borough Council accepted the commission's recommendations in February 2023).

[44] *See, e.g.*, *First Recipients of Williamsburg Descendants Scholarship Announced*, WILLIAMSBURG CMTY. FOUND. (Aug. 5, 2025), https://williamsburgcommunityfoundation.org/first-recipients-of-williamsburg-descendants-scholarship-announced/ (describing a City-funded scholarship that arose from the Williamsburg committee's work); Rey Llerena, *Charleston City Council Votes to Establish Racial Conciliation Commission*, WCSC LIVE 5 NEWS (Feb. 9, 2022), https://www.live5news.com/2022/02/09/charleston-city-council-set-vote-establish-racial-conciliation-commission/ (reporting council's vote to create a standing Human Affairs and Racial Conciliation Commission following the special commission's work).

[45] *See, e.g.*, Abigail Kurten, *What Did Iowa City's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Accomplish in Its 4-Year Run?*, KCRG (Dec. 19, 2024), https://www.kcrg.com/2024/12/20/what-did-iowa-citys-truth-reconciliation-commission-accomplish-its-4-year-run (reporting that no policies had changed as of the commission's end).

[46] *See, e.g.*, Matanji, *supra* note 14, at p. 85, 101(describing community frustration with unfulfilled promises from city leaders, and a commissioner's frustration that the commission's work did not move from discussion to action, leaving residents feeling ignored).

[47] Yin Paradies, Jehonathan Ben, Nida Denson, et al., *Racism as a Determinant of Health: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis*, 10 PLOS ONE e0138511 (2015), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0138511; Katherine Kirkinis, Alex Pieterse, Christina Martin, et al., *Racism, Racial Discrimination, and Trauma: A Systematic Review of the Social Science Literature*, 26 ETHNICITY & HEALTH 392 (2021), https://doi.org/10.1080/13557858.2018.1514453.

[48] Sara Alang, Debra McAlpine & Rachel Hardeman, *Police Brutality and Mistrust in Medical Institutions*, J. RACIAL & ETHNIC HEALTH DISPARITIES 760 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-020-00706-w; Martha Hostetter & Sarah Klein, *Understanding and Ameliorating Medical Mistrust Among Black Americans*, COMMONWEALTH FUND (Jan. 14, 2021), https://doi.org/10.26099/9grt-2b21.

[49] AM. PUB. HEALTH ASS'N, Structural Racism Is a Public Health Crisis: Impact on the Black Community (Oct. 2020), https://www.apha.org/policy-and-advocacy/public-health-policy-briefs/policy-database/2021/01/13/structural-racism-is-a-public-health-crisis; NAT'L ACADS. OF SCIS., ENG'G & MED., *supra* note 8, ch. 3.

[50] *See generally* Jamila M. Porter & Aysha Dominguez Pamukcu, *Advancing Equity and Justice*, APHA PRESS (2025), https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/book/10.2105/9780875533605; González & Varney, *supra* note 1; W.K. KELLOGG FOUND., *Truth, Racial Healing & Transformation (TRHT)*, https://healourcommunities.org/; DE BEAUMONT FOUND. & AM. PUB. HEALTH ASS'N, *Healing Through Policy*, https://debeaumont.org/programs/healing-through-policy/; AMNESTY INT'L, *Truth, Justice and Reparation: Establishing an Effective Truth Commission*, AI INDEX POL 30/009/2007 (June 11, 2007), https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/pol30/009/2007/en/.

[51] Porter & Pamukcu, *supra* note 49, at p. 223.