

Dr. Adewale Troutman

Disparities in our lives reflect in our health

BY ALEX ZIELINSKI
STAFF WRITER

The president of the American Public Health Association, Dr. Adewale Troutman has devoted his 40 years of work to health equity within active communities, leading him to found the first Center for Health Equity.

This summer, the Coalition for a Liveable Future released an updated Regional Equity Atlas — an online interactive set of maps that use data and analysis to illustrate which metro neighborhoods do (and do not) have the resources to build a healthy community.

The maps show the correlation between low-income and minority neighborhoods and inadequate health resources, along with a variety of specific issues in each.

He recently visited Portland to deliver the keynote address for Coalition for a Liveable Future's Regional Livability Summit.

We spoke to Troutman before his speech about his take on regional equity both locally and on a global scale.

Adewale Troutman: Like anyone, minorities face general health issues, but with added impact of gentrification, they find themselves living outside of areas where health care is readily accessible.

Alex Zielinski: Where else have you seen this trend?

A.T.: It's not uncommon in a larger metropolitan area. I'm from New York City, and I've seen the same thing happen in Harlem. The poorer population moves out to worse areas as the prices in housing raise. This ultimately affects the health of an entire population.

A.Z.: What steps have been taken in some of these areas to move past regional inequities?

A.T.: In several instances awareness is increased through policy, especially with the

HOPE VI projects (a program developed by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development meant to turn the worst public housing projects in the U.S. into mixed-income developments). The unique part about these projects is that there is an assurance that the individuals who have been displaced during the construction can move back when the project is finished.

It seems small, but it's a significant commitment. For the moment, this isn't being tracked; they need to start surveying how many people actually return to these areas. There should be living wage job opportunities nearby, transportation options, etcetera. It has to remain livable.

A.Z.: What have you noticed during your short visit to Portland? Any significant equity stand-outs?

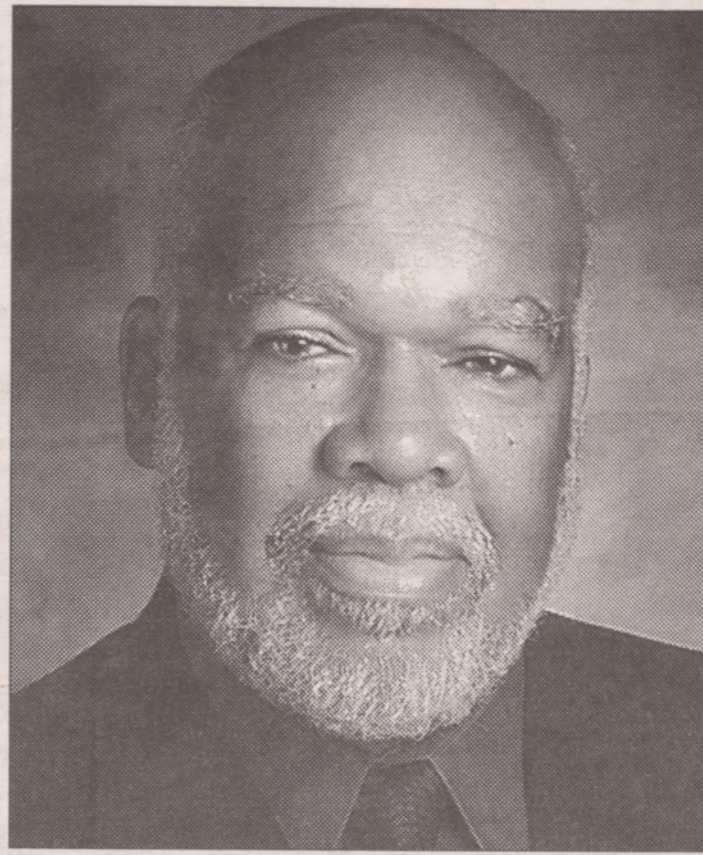
A.T.: We drove through Mississippi St. when I got into town, and saw the gentrification in place. There were no people of color on the streets. Where are they now?

A.Z.: What did you think about Coalition for a Liveable Future's regional equity atlas?

A.T.: I was very impressed by the maps; so many cities have yet to form that kind of comprehensive data. Data mapping is important and is a definite first step, but nothing will come out of the data unless you follow it with community organizing and advocacy that can lead to policy. You have to do it right.

A.Z.: Where could it go wrong?

A.T.: Misinterpretation. There's value in taking a step back and making sure we're on the same page when it comes to health equity. We need to be aware that health equity helps everyone, the entire



population. Health is a basic human right. Knowing how to build a movement — especially when it's in its infancy — is so important.

A.Z.: How does our country compare to others when it comes to health equity?

A.T.: We in the United States don't do very well compared to other countries when it comes to health care and education: low literacy rate, life expectancy rates, all of that. And other countries who've faced similar issues have raised above them much faster than we have.

A.Z.: How could the Affordable Care Act impact this trend?

A.T.: It has potential to positively effect minority communities across the country. The Affordable Health Care Act focuses very heavily on prevention — which is unheard of in this country. It's unfortunate that it's at this standstill. As far as I'm concerned, the Affordable Health Care Act is the law of the land.

A.Z.: What's next?

A.T.: I've been working in this vein of work for 40 years and we still have a long way to go. The social movement still has many divisions to cross, but I have faith in our growing support.

What the Equity Atlas tells us about Portland

The Coalition for a Liveable Future has created a series of maps, to be combined and compared, that chart our region's demographics, disparities and opportunities. The results show a city and region that has developed around economic and racial lines, where opportunities are not equitably distributed and where future planning is needed.

Among the findings from the map data are patterns in health disparities, particularly conditions that can be prevented, as well as racial, housing and transit disparities.

Health: The latest version of the Atlas program examines the incidence of chronic diseases such as asthma, diabetes, and heart disease. Repeatedly, neighborhoods with built environments that encourage healthy eating and active living tend to also be places where residents have lower rates of chronic disease. The maps also show strong relationships between the distribution of populations in poverty and populations of color and the locations of areas with higher rates of chronic disease.

Housing: The maps also show that racial disparities in home ownership rates continue to exist throughout the region. The areas with the greatest gaps in home ownership between communities of color and whites tend to be areas with high rates of poverty and high percentages of populations of color. In addition, housing continued to become less affordable in Portland's central city over the last decade, leading to displacement of low income populations and communities of color from close-in Portland neighborhoods to outlying neighborhoods and suburbs.

Transit Access to Jobs: Many low income neighborhoods have limited transit access to family wage jobs, particularly in parts of Washington, Clackamas, and Clark counties. The maps also suggest poor transit access to jobs for many people of color.

Source: Coalition for a Liveable Future

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