

Fostering Well-Being in the Face of Bias, Hate, and Discrimination



Fostering Well-Being in the Face of Racial, Ethnic, Bias

Emerging Critical Needs

Throughout the focus group conversations and SME interviews, there were numerous mentions of the severe impacts that federal immigration policy changes and funding cuts are having on immigrant, refugee, undocumented, and asylum-seeking community members. These changes have led to significant barriers for the people impacted to access school, jobs, public services, and medical care. Organizations are experiencing significant increases in requests for legal aid, basic needs support, and mental health services, but they are struggling with limited funding and staff capacity. Additionally, many small organizations have shifted the service delivery model to accommodate barriers for community members in accessing services, including home visits for case management and food delivery.

Due to the critical and extraordinary impact of these changes, Bellevue is recognizing the need to highlight and expand services to foster well-being.

Photo provided by Families of Color Seattle



Overview

Bellevue's increasingly diverse population includes many residents who face bias, racism, xenophobia, and other forms of discrimination. Whether it's a youth experiencing racial bullying, a Muslim woman harassed on public transit, or a trans person struggling to find affirming care, these experiences take a real toll on mental and physical health. Organizations working in this space foster community well-being by providing healing spaces, advocacy, civil rights education, and rapid response to hate incidents. **Addressing discrimination is not just a moral imperative, it is a public health and safety priority.**

General Trends & Key Findings

- Housing discrimination complaints fell from 787 in 2022 to 347 in 2023 statewide; however, 223 were related to disability discrimination, highlighting ongoing structural barriers (Washington State Standard, 2024).
- In King County, 112 hate crime incidents were reported in 2023, with Bellevue responsible for 15 cases disproportionately affecting Black, LGBTQ+, and immigrant communities (King County Human Rights Commission, 2024).
- Nearly 25% of marginalized Bellevue residents report feeling unsafe in public spaces, pointing to gaps in prevention and support services (City of Bellevue Community Survey, 2024).
- Bellevue has an opportunity to enhance rapid response to hate incidents and expand culturally responsive support services, advancing safety, inclusion, and community resilience.





Photo provided by Rwandan Community Association of Washington State

Community Voice / Lived Experience

Barriers Rooted in Bias and Discrimination

Life's obstacles in Bellevue are not equally distributed but reflect deep disparities rooted in systemic bias. Residents' experiences with human services are shaped not only by what is offered but also by how they are treated when seeking help. Bias and discrimination—whether overt or subtle—remain major barriers.



“Discrimination comes in subtle forms—people get overlooked for housing or care because of their background.”

– SME

Exclusion often manifests quietly through rental denials, lower quality medical care, or providers not taking clients seriously. Immigrants, LGBTQIA2S+ individuals, people of color, and those with disabilities frequently face these barriers, not due to a lack of services, but due to how services are delivered.

“We see a lot of hate, especially toward immigrants and LGBTQ folks. It wears people down.” – SME

The cumulative trauma of microaggressions, harassment, and “othering” creates a protective distance between marginalized individuals and supportive services. When seeking help risks judgment or re-traumatization, many opt out, perpetuating isolation, poverty, and worsening health. Entire communities often navigate around systems rather than through them, driven by painful lived experience.

From Access to Belonging

Fostering true well-being requires more than access, it requires a sense of



Addressing bias, hate, and discrimination is central to whether services effectively reach and uplift Bellevue's diverse population.

Persistent Gaps in Support Services

Surveyed community members reported limited availability and accessibility of services to address discrimination. Many faced transportation and logistical challenges. Timeliness and cultural fit were often inadequate, resulting in low overall satisfaction.

The Human Impact

Participants emphasized that thriving communities actively confront systemic racism and exclusion. Well-being is tied deeply to being seen, heard, and treated with dignity across all systems, from justice to local services.

Many shared experiences of judgment, misunderstanding, and dismissal due to race, immigration status, disability, or language barriers, leading to withdrawal or disengagement from services.

Participants highlighted disparities in funding and resource allocation, noting that while some groups benefit from strong institutional support, others, especially Black, African, immigrant, and disabled communities, face significant gaps.

Language access remains a critical issue, with non-English speakers often overlooked or discouraged from engagement. Participants called for plain



language services, translation, and culturally informed approaches that foster welcome rather than intimidation.

Fear of deportation, “outing,” or judgment prevents many from accessing services. Broader social and donor pressures sometimes limit organizational capacity to serve marginalized groups safely.

Trust and Cultural Connection

Trust emerges as foundational for accessing support. Many found comfort in culturally connected networks such as grocery stores, churches, or peer groups—places where they felt seen and respected.

“I got to meet people that reflected my experiences... and I felt that they would understand me and not judge me.” –
Focus Group Participant



A Call for Inclusion

Building well-being in Bellevue means creating a culture of inclusion where every resident can access resources free of fear, stigma, and systemic hurdles.

Community Survey Results on Discrimination or Racism Support

- Only **13.8%** of survey respondents were aware of local services addressing discrimination or racism.
- Just **12.1%** were satisfied with the support they received for these issues.
- Among those for whom these services applied, **41.3%** found the services in their community; **45.2%** could travel to the service within reasonable time.
- Timely access is limited: only **39.5%** received services without long waits.
- Cultural and linguistic appropriateness met the needs of **46.5%** of respondents.
- Overall satisfaction with support was low, at **41.8%**.

City-Funded Initiatives & Impact

Fostering well-being is essential to ensuring that all Bellevue residents, particularly immigrant and refugee communities, feel safe, supported, and included. Many community members navigate complex challenges such as systemic inequities, cultural isolation, language barriers, and direct or indirect experiences of bias and discrimination. These challenges are often



compounded for individuals with intersecting identities and needs, including people with disabilities, limited English proficiency, or those living in single-parent or low-income households. In response, community-based organizations across Bellevue are providing culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and trust-based services that promote healing, connection, and access to opportunity.

A core component of these services is **case management and systems navigation**. Organizations like **4 Tomorrow's Life Services Program** offer trauma-informed, wraparound case management to help households in East King County achieve both short- and long-term goals as they navigate complex service systems. **Open Doors for Multicultural Families** works specifically with families of youth with disabilities, guiding them through the intricacies of developmental disability and special education services. Additionally, **The Circle, Africans on the Eastside (AOE)**, and the **Chinese Information and Service Center (CISC)** provide multilingual case management and advocacy for families facing trauma and instability, helping them overcome systemic barriers and access public resources. The **Congolese Integration Network (CIN)** also delivers critical services, including utility and rental assistance, resource navigation, and group-based supports, that build stability and empower community growth.

Beyond individualized support, many organizations strengthen community resilience through **peer-led programs, educational workshops, and cultural navigation services**. **The Circle, AOE, and CISC** facilitate



orientation sessions, informational classes, and community workshops that help immigrant and refugee families navigate life in a new country, fostering empowerment and social connection. **Families of Color Seattle (FOCS)** offers peer-led parent groups that create culturally affirming spaces for BIPOC families to develop parenting skills, build supportive networks, and openly discuss race, identity, and lived experience. **CIN** expands youth and family engagement through after-school enrichment activities, while the **Immigrant Women's Community Center** provides culturally grounded workshops, healing circles, and mediation services that uplift low-income immigrant and refugee women and families.

Recognizing that mental and emotional well-being is essential to overall health, organizations such as the **Ubumwe Women Association** lead **peer-led healing groups** for immigrant and refugee women, particularly single mothers, who are coping with trauma, grief, and systemic stress. These groups create safe spaces for emotional expression, mutual support, and practical problem-solving. Complementing this work, the

Photo provided by Rwandan Community Association of Washington State



Immigrant Women's Community Center offers one-on-one case management and navigation for women and families navigating conflict, emotional distress, or mental health challenges, delivering compassionate, culturally relevant support.

Finally, **youth and family programs** help build confidence, identity, and intergenerational connection. **Centro Cultural Mexicano** leads bilingual youth development programming that includes academic support, creative expression, leadership opportunities, and workshops for parents. These initiatives nurture safe and inclusive spaces where youth can thrive and families can grow stronger together.

Together, these city-funded services form a **model of care**, that centers on equity, dignity, and belonging. By addressing the impacts of bias, hate, and discrimination through culturally grounded services, Bellevue's nonprofit partners play a vital role in building a safer, more inclusive, and thriving community for all residents.

City of Bellevue Programs

Bellevue Police Safe Place Program designated certain businesses, schools, and community locations as safe havens for individuals who have experienced or are experiencing anti-LGBTQ harassment or crime. These sites display Safe Place signage to signal support and encourage victims to seek help and report incidents. The Bellevue Police Department also has a dedicated LGBTQ liaison officer who fosters partnerships with the LGBTQ community and serves as a key resource for support and information.

