

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on the Impact of Structural Racism on Substance Use and Substance Use Disorders

Approved by the Board of Trustees, July 2022

Approved by the Assembly, May 2022

“Policy documents are approved by the APA Assembly and Board of Trustees. . . . These are . . . position statements that define APA official policy on specific subjects. . . .” – *APA Operations Manual*

Issue:

In January 2021, the American Psychiatric Association took a historic step in apologizing for its role in supporting structural racism and by trying to rectify past injustices. Inequities in access to and quality of healthcare are primary drivers of the disparate clinical outcomes among individuals with substance use disorder (SUD); these inequities are either directly or indirectly affected by social and structural determinants of health, including race. The impact of substance use and SUDs is greater in minority communities that experience more severe health consequences than white populations. Race-based disparities exist not only in the treatment provided by health care professionals but also in the public, law enforcement, and the media. More efforts are needed to promote equity in the recognition and treatment of SUDs in diverse groups.

APA Position:

The American Psychiatric Association:

- **Supports legislation and policies that promote equity and improve the social and structural determinants of substance use and substance use disorders (SUD) and opposes legislation and policies that perpetuate racial inequities.**
- **Urges healthcare systems to assess, improve and restructure services as needed to provide a range of SUD treatments within their communities and ensure equitable access to medication for addictions treatment in all settings.**
- **Recognizes that US drug policy has produced profoundly unequal outcomes across racial groups, racial discrimination by law enforcement and persecution of communities. At a minimum, policies that result in disproportionate arrest and incarceration rates, such as harsh mandatory minimum sentences and disparities in sentencing, should be eliminated in favor of treatment for and decriminalization of drug use.**
- **Supports multidisciplinary education on historical and current racial inequities around substance use and SUDs (applicable to medical schools, residency programs and continuing medical education as well as across a range of community, public health and prevention resources aimed at the general public).**
- **Supports culturally informed research in substance use and SUDs to examine ways to increase the relevance, engagement, and effectiveness of prevention and treatment interventions for diverse communities.**

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