



## **Joint Statement from the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors and the National Council for Behavioral Health**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Washington, D.C. (June 15, 2020) – As people throughout the nation address police brutality and other overt acts of racism, we must explicitly acknowledge that many of the institutions throughout our country were founded upon and continue to perpetuate systemic racism. Our health care system, including behavioral health, is rife with less obvious but deeply insidious examples of these inequities.

Differential access to health care in America – physical health care and behavioral health care – represents a glaring example of racism, which we have seen on full display as COVID-19 spread across our nation. The pandemic has devastated African American communities.

Social determinants of health – one’s race and the multitude of factors that make up where one lives, works, plays and prays – are deeply impacted by systemic racism and should not dictate the quality of care a person receives. Too often in America, these factors unfairly determine one’s access to quality care.

We must repair health care in America by addressing persistent disparities rooted in systemic racism. And we have an obligation to do so. We have an obligation to break down barriers to improve health care access. Eliminating disparities will improve individual and community health. This requires ensuring that everyone has access to the best possible care because one’s physical health or behavioral health should not depend on the color of one’s skin.

Our organizations vow to raise awareness about health care inequities, and urge our members to do the same, by:

- Creating safe spaces for individuals receiving care and individuals providing care to give voice to their experiences of trauma rooted in systemic racism.
- Challenging our own implicit biases and committing to developing practices to approach care through the lens of cross-cultural humility and the intentional promotion and practices of diversity, equity and inclusion.
- Removing structural inequity in hiring, disciplinary and promotion practices within our own institutions.
- Opposing and working to eliminate pre-existing social and health care policies, laws and practices that sustain racial inequity in our society.
- Implementing policy and practice changes that will systematically eradicate health disparities.

- Working with the African American community, and specifically African American advocacy organizations, to improve access to quality health care in committed, transparent and quantifiable ways.

Please join us as we work to improve access to quality physical and behavioral health care through ending historical and contemporary racial inequities faced by African Americans across our nation.

This is our opportunity, now is the time!

[You can make the difference.](#)