

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Mental Health Equity and the Social and Structural Determinants of Mental Health

Approved by the Board of Trustees, December 2018

Approved by the Assembly, November 2018

"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:

Unequal access to social resources perpetuate mental health disparities, particularly for patients and their families who belong to groups that are marginalized or under-resourced. Unequal allocation of resources and application of institutional and public policies worsen these disparities. Social determinants of mental health include social supports, employment, civic engagement, socioeconomic and educational status, discrimination, and mental health stigma among other factors. Structural determinants of mental health include the actions and norms of systems and policies, such as the economic, legal, political, and healthcare systems. Health equity is a public health paradigm and quality goal that aims to promote equitable access to health-related opportunities when needs are equal, provide enhanced opportunities when needs are greater, and address systemic issues that perpetuate inequalities.

The APA includes in its values statement "advocacy for patients" and "care and sensitivity for patients and compassion for their families." This position statement is relevant to the APA because understanding and improving the social and structural determinants of health involves sensitivity to the lives and environments of patients and families, and promotion of mental health equity represents leadership and advocacy in this area. Psychiatrists have a key role in promoting mental health equity in clinical care, research, education, interventions, administration and public policy advocacy.

APA Position:

The American Psychiatric Association:

- **Supports legislation and policies that promote mental health equity and improve the social and structural determinants of mental health, and formally objects to legislation and policies that perpetuate structural inequities.**
- **Advocates for the dissemination of evidence-based interventions that improve both the social and mental health needs of patients and their families.**
- **Urges healthcare systems to assess and improve their capabilities to screen, understand, and address the structural and social determinants of mental health.**
- **Supports medical and public education on the structural and social determinants of mental health, mental health equity, and related evidence-based interventions.**
 - **Urges medical school and graduate medical education accrediting and professional bodies to emphasize educational competencies in structural and social determinants of mental health and mental health equity.**

- Urges psychiatry residency training directors and other psychiatric educators to use systematic approaches to teaching about structural and social determinants of mental health.
 - Supports the training of psychiatrists, in graduate and continuing medical education, in best practices to address the structural and social determinants of mental health and promote health equity.
- Advocates for increased funding for research to better understand the mechanisms by which structural and social determinants affect mental illness and recovery and to develop new evidence-based interventions to promote mental health equity.

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