



HEALTH CARE REFORM

Disparities in Mental Health Status and Mental Health Care

Mental and behavioral health is a critical and frequently unaddressed matter in racial and ethnic minority communities. Blacks, Latinos, American Indians/Alaska Natives, and Asian Americans are over-represented in populations that are particularly at risk for mental health disorders. Additionally, minority individuals may experience symptoms that are undiagnosed, under-diagnosed, or misdiagnosed for cultural, linguistic, or historical reasons.

The lack of attention to the mental and behavioral health needs of racial and ethnic minorities and the inadequate provision of culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health care in racial and ethnic minority communities demonstrates a clear need for encouraging collaboration and finding ways to close the gap in care. The federal government has a critical role to play in addressing the issue of racial and ethnic disparities in mental health status and mental health care by supporting legislation and regulations that will improve the health and well-being of minorities.

APA RECOMMENDATION: Eliminate disparities in mental health status and mental health care through the use of psychological and behavioral research and services that are culturally and linguistically competent.

Specifically, attention should be directed to:

- Facilitate partnerships among physicians, mental and behavioral health providers, educators, community leaders, government agencies, and families to ensure development and implementation of culturally and linguistically competent and evidence-based prevention, early intervention, and treatment.
- Increase the availability of culturally and linguistically competent mental and behavioral health services accessible to racial and ethnic minorities.
- Increase research examining the complexities and intersections of multiple statuses/identities (e.g., socioeconomic status, disability, and immigrant status) and how these may contribute to psychological health.
- Foster positive relationships and programs within racial and ethnic minority communities to increase awareness of mental health issues and prevent environmental factors that may place individuals at risk.

- Increase funding for training mental and behavioral health professionals and to train these professionals to become culturally and linguistically competent.
- Develop and implement policy and programs based on psychological and behavioral research ensuring that racial and ethnic minorities are empowered through culturally and linguistically informed and evidence-based strategies.
- Advocate for local, State and national funding agencies to incorporate culturally and linguistically competent guidelines into proposals for programs for racial and ethnic minority children, youth, and families.
- Increase collaboration across federal funding organizations involved in racial and ethnic minority resiliency research.