

APA calls for population health approach to solve critical issues in society

March 24 2022



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Psychologists should adopt a population health approach to their work, focusing on the health of entire communities and taking into account such factors as income, education, culture and environment, according to

the American Psychological Association. A population health approach focuses on both promoting health and reducing health inequities within populations.

"This approach utilizes [psychological science](#) and evidence-based early identification measures and [preventive interventions](#) to improve the health, development and functioning of the entire population," according to a [policy adopted Feb. 25 by APA's governing Council of Representatives](#). "For population health models to be most effective, researchers, practitioners, educators and students of the science of psychology should be actively engaged in the research/development, design, implementation, operation and evaluation of these systems and initiatives."

Population health involves a multi-tiered approach that includes: 1) universal provision of preventive tools and [health promotion](#); 2) monitoring, anticipatory guidance and early intervention for those with [risk factors](#) for physical, [mental health](#) and substance abuse conditions; and 3) specially tailored care for those experiencing illness and/or escalating [physical health](#) and mental distress, it says.

Many public health problems—including obesity, violence, trauma and addiction—involve psychological components. For population health models to be most effective in solving such problems, psychologists "should actively collaborate with communities and organizations engaged in their design, research, implementation, operation and evaluation," the policy says.

The need for a population health approach is based on at least three assumptions, the policy states.

"First, health and mental health are not dichotomous, but rather inextricably intertwined; second, most individuals experience

psychological stress and distress at some time in their lives that negatively affects their quality of life, and the distribution of risk greatly varies among populations; and third, individuals' risk of severe or chronic physical or mental conditions cannot be considered in isolation from the disease risk for the population to which they belong."

The new policy calls on APA to educate psychologists and community partners about population health. It calls on psychologists themselves to work across and within systems affecting physical and mental health. And it urges [early intervention](#) and working "upstream"—before people have a mental health diagnosis—to prevent people from reaching a crisis.

"Psychologists are essential and routine partners in the development, promotion and dissemination of evidence-based solutions to these challenges." it states. "As vital contributors to these efforts, psychologists recognize that such solutions must be tailored, and culturally and linguistically aligned with the specific needs of the community."

Provided by American Psychological Association

Citation: APA calls for population health approach to solve critical issues in society (2022, March 24) retrieved 20 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2022-03-apa-population-health-approach-critical.html>

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