

Psychology must act to address health inequities

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Psychology must take concrete steps to expose and mitigate the impacts of systemic and structural factors that affect physical and mental health, according to a new report from the American Psychological Association.

There is overwhelming evidence that environmental, social and behavioral factors—all areas of psychology's expertise—contribute to [health disparities](#) and lead to differences in quality of life, access to treatment, quality of care and overall [health outcomes](#).

Structural racism, which influences the circumstances in which people live and work and is intensified by political, economic and [social influences](#), is a key driver of health inequities, according to a report from [APA's Presidential Task Force on Psychology and Health Equity](#).

The report was accepted Thursday by APA's governing Council of Representatives by a vote of 161–0, with two abstentions, at its meeting in Minneapolis, which coincided with APA2022, the organization's annual convention.

The task force report lays out a roadmap for actions by APA, psychologists and others to address health inequities in education and training, research, publications and professional practice. Task force members were appointed by APA Past President Jennifer F. Kelly, Ph.D.

"Health inequities are not inevitable; they are systemic and avoidable," the report authors wrote. "These factors include racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination; [chronic stress](#), adverse or traumatic early childhood events; exposure to violence, including institutional violence; crowded housing conditions, greater exposure to [environmental hazards](#), and lack of health insurance or underinsurance; and other social determinants of health that differ systematically by population."

"Psychology can make a huge contribution to advancing health equity," Kelly said in releasing the report. "The task force has made bold and concrete recommendations for all of psychology, from reaching, recruiting and mentoring students of color in becoming psychologists, to

advocating for creative payment models to bring effective [mental health](#) and medical care to underserved communities, to rethinking how we conduct and publish our science."

The report recommends developing strategies to increase the racial and ethnic diversity of the psychology workforce to better address the mental health needs of communities of color—noting that more than 80% currently identify as white. It also calls for creating outreach and recruitment programs aiding communities of color, implementing more flexible training programs to support students with multiple life demands, and promoting culturally relevant methods and principles for health equity research in all psychology programs.

Other [task force](#) recommendations include:

- Advocating for greater federal and private research funding about health equity.
- Adopting new language and practices for [academic journals](#) to reduce bias and ensure consistent reporting of demographic characteristics.
- Increasing the representation of scholars from underrepresented backgrounds on APA journal and publication boards.
- Developing continuing education courses that include training objectives related to health equity.
- Developing [professional practice](#) guidelines focusing on social determinants of health and addressing treatment barriers and service delivery challenges.
- Identifying and promoting practice innovations to improve the way that mental health services are provided to diverse populations and communities, including incorporating psychologist practices into community settings.
- Expanding access to care through mobile apps, telehealth and other emerging technologies.

The report builds upon the Task Force's [Resolution on Advancing Equity in Psychology](#), which was unanimously approved by the APA Council of Representatives in 2021.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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