



Open Letter from Allied Health Disparity Networks on Racism, Police Brutality, and Health Equity

June 4, 2020

Repeated instances of racism, institutionalized racism, violence, and state sponsored police violence have shocked and traumatized many over the last month. The overlaid disproportionately-negative impact of the pandemic on marginalized populations has further worn down the spirits and strength of many people who do not have the luxury of being able to avoid stigma and discrimination.

We acknowledge that African Americans bear a disproportionate burden of this stigma, discrimination, and violence. George Floyd, Tony McDade, Sean Reed, Breonna Taylor, Nina Pop, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many others should all be alive today.

As public health experts we want to address two important points related to these phenomena. First, housing disparities, educational disparities, employment disparities, institutional public health disparities, and other systemic injustices are inextricably linked with health disparities. We cannot be free of any of these until we enact substantial change in all areas. These systemic injustices are all completely tied to white supremacist ideologies that have been present in this country since its formation.

Secondly, injustice anywhere is injustice everywhere. Associative trauma is a well documented phenomenon. African Americans in this country have endured generations of systemic oppression; the health toll of current events on this population is incalculable. COVID-19 has created an additional burden, leaving many of us depleted. Now more than ever, it is time to invest in tangible solutions and resources to help us all stabilize our health.

Until racism, sexism, classism, transphobia, homophobia, islamophobia, xenophobia, and all other systems of oppression are completely and permanently dismantled, we see constitutionally-protected protesting as a public health imperative: carry signs, demand change, find ways to open closed doors to people in underserved communities, demand inclusive policies and funding changes. Most importantly, vote and fight for the right of disenfranchised voters. If the choices on the ballot do not align within an equity-centered agenda, create a new ballot choice. Do not stop until every person in this country can feel certain they have the right to live and thrive. We stand firmly with all African Americans to proclaim loudly that Black Lives Matter. You matter, and together, we can and will bring about true health equity.

*Asian Pacific Partners for Empowerment, Advocacy, and Leadership
National African American Tobacco Prevention Network
National Behavioral Health Network for Tobacco and Cancer Control
National LGBT Cancer Network
National Native Network (Keep It Sacred)*

Networking for Health Equity is the alliance of CDC-funded national health disparity networks focused on tobacco and cancer. For more information contact mScott@naatpn.org or scout@cancer-network.org.