



The Goal: Mental Health Care That is Equal for All

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According to the Institute of Medicine, health equity is “providing care that does not vary in quality because of personal characteristics.”

Today, the American health care system does not provide equal care to all people. COVID-19 has made these inequities more clear. According to the Centers for Disease Control, “34% of deaths were among non-Hispanic Black people, though this group accounts for only 12% of the total U.S. population.” And many people of color are not getting the support for mental health or substance use issues that they need.

Having access to care

According to the CDC, social determinants of health are conditions in the places where people live, learn, work, and play that affect a wide range of health and quality-of-life risks and outcomes. This includes mental health and substance use.

When someone is struggling with a mental health or substance related problem, it is important that they can access care. Depression, disability, suicide and risks of overdose are all examples of negative health outcomes that can occur when someone cannot receive the care they need.

There are many causes of health inequity. By learning more about the barriers to equal care, you can help make a difference in someone’s life.

Barriers to care

Below are some of the biggest issues facing people of color with mental health problems.

- Lack of diversity in providers
 - According to the National Association for Mental Health, members of racial groups generally have “fewer mental health professionals in their immediate area and fewer providers with a similar background.”
 - According to the American Psychological Association, as of 2017, only 2 percent of member psychologists were Black.
- Provider bias



- According to the National Association for Mental Illness, Black people may be more likely to report physical symptoms for mental health problems, but not receive a diagnosis or treatment from providers
- Black men are more likely to be diagnosed with schizophrenia when their symptoms are more associated with mood disorders or PTSD.
- Lack of trust
 - Black people with mental health problems — particularly schizophrenia, bipolar disorders and other psychoses — are more likely to be incarcerated than people of other races.
- Lack of insurance
 - According to the Centers for Disease Control, 27% of Hispanics, 13.6 percent of Black people lack health insurance coverage, while only 8% of non-Hispanic whites are without coverage.
- Stigma
 - Mental health stigma continues to be a problem. People who don't have mental health issues often don't understand the problems, and people with mental health issues can feel a sense of shame.
 - According to the American Psychiatric Association, public stigma, "involves the negative or discriminatory attitudes that others have about mental illness." While self-stigma "refers to the negative attitudes, including internalized shame, that people with mental illness have about their own condition."
 - Stigma can be harmful. According to the American Psychiatric Association, stigma can contribute to "worsening symptoms and reduced likelihood of getting treatment."

How to get help

If you or a loved one needs mental health services here are some actions you can take:

Find the right treatment:

If the person needing help has health coverage, contact the insurer about how to find the right mental health provider. Our provider search does allow members to search for providers with certain ethnic groups.

If the person who needs help doesn't have coverage, there may still be ways to get help.

- Mentalhealth.gov has resources for [connecting to mental health help](#) right away.
- National Alliance for Mental Illness — The nation's largest grassroots mental health organization has a free Helpline to answer questions, offer support and provide practical next steps. Call 1-800-950-NAMI (6264).
- If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, get help right away. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline anytime at 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255). If there's an immediate danger, call 911.

Make an action plan:



According to [mentalhealth.org](https://www.mentalhealth.org), the best way to support someone having a mental health issue is, “recognizing the signs of mental health problems and connecting them to professional [help](#)”

[This guide has specific ideas on ways to help.](#)

Driving towards change

There are efforts to make changes to make mental health care more equitable.

The National Network to Eliminate Disparities in Behavioral Health (NNED) promotes policies, practices, standards and research to eliminate behavioral health disparities. Their news feed features stories about equity in behavioral health. [Go to the NNED news feed.](#)

Mentalhealth.gov lists organizations that are involved in mental health at the local level. You can learn more about policies on mental health care and coverage. [Go to mentalhealth.gov’s community organizations.](#)

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has a toolkit on actions you can take on to promote access to mental healthcare. [Go to the NAMI toolkit.](#)

The US Dept of Health and Human Services has a site with info about healthcare for minorities, including mental health. [Go to HHS healthcare for minorities site.](#)

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