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The American Academy of Nursing and the American Nurses Association Call for Social Justice to Address Racism and Health Equity in Communities of Color

Nurses Stand to Uphold Human Dignity as Coronavirus Cases Continue to Rise Across the Nation

August 4, 2020— Today, the American Academy of Nursing (Academy) and the American Nurses Association (ANA) issued the following statement on the urgent need for social justice to address prevalent racism and discrimination against communities of color, especially Black and Brown people. Nurses stand to champion equity while upholding dignity and respect of individuals as the country continues to grapple with the devastating spikes in COVID-19 cases and reckons with the compounding, longstanding, and systemic racism within health care and our society.

For far too long, communities of color have been disproportionately suffering as a result of persistent inequities and biases that exist in society. The current unrest worldwide in response to unjust killings of Black and Brown people as well as higher rates of COVID-19 within these communities, has emphasized more clearly the need for social justice reform that addresses racism and realigns structures to enable the attainment of better health regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, social group, or geography. The nursing profession, as leaders of compassionate care, upholds the highest commitment to achieving health equity and combating discriminatory actions.

“Our collective moral vision is for broad awareness and collaborative action in addressing social inequities and health disparities,” said ANA President Ernest J. Grant, PhD, RN, FAAN. “Nurses have a responsibility to use our voices to call for change. The Code of Ethics obligates nurses to be allies and to advocate and speak up against racism, discrimination, and injustice.”

The Code of Ethics for Nurses (Code) clearly states in provision eight that “the nurse collaborates with other health professionals and the public to protect human rights, promote health diplomacy, and reduce disparities.”¹ The profession’s code exemplifies our promise to advocate for safe and healthy communities. This advocacy extends to all individuals as noted in the first provision of the Code which states nurses “practice with compassion and respect for inherent dignity, worth, and unique attributes of every person.”

Further, we must remove areas of bias that perpetuate negative behaviors and reinforce harmful stereotypes and stigmas. This extends to those biases held by nurses and other health care providers. Working together, health professionals, public health officials, health care and industry leaders, system administrators, and policy makers, can confront and directly address these behaviors along with the unfair practices that lead to discrimination against Black and Brown individuals and communities of color. It is imperative in this time of incredible uncertainty and unrest, that we create and sustain cultures of understanding, belonging, open dialogue, and inclusion in workplaces, within our profession, and in communities. Commitment to addressing bias is a meaningful starting point to make lasting change.

¹ American Nurses Association. (2015). *Code of Ethics for Nurses with Interpretive Statements*. Silver Spring, MD.

The nursing profession stands ready to ease suffering, settle confusion, and foster inclusivity while maintaining their firm commitment to the Code of Ethics for Nurses. Continued vigilance is of the utmost importance to enact policies that achieve health equity and tackle systemic racism within society, health care, and our own profession. Nurses can be change agents by responding to racism when they experience or see it occur, further their understanding of implicit and unconscious bias, and work within their own institutions to develop cultures of inclusivity. Moreover, nurses can advocate for policies at the local, state, and national level that address health equity, which will not only improve well-being now, but also continue to lay the foundation for better health in the future.

“The nursing profession advocates for social justice in the pursuit of optimal health” said Eileen Sullivan-Marx, PhD, RN, FAAN, American Academy of Nursing President. “This must extend to our own understanding of the systems and structures that block this vision from becoming a reality. As we see a dramatic rise in coronavirus cases and more deaths, the toll that this pandemic has taken on communities of color becomes more and more devastating, especially considering we have yet to determine its future ramifications. We must commit now to change, with fierce conviction, so that our profession can ease suffering and elevate health equity in our recovery.”

The Academy and ANA as organizations are reviewing our own practices and policies to reduce racism and further identify ways that we can foster cultures of inclusivity, while also creating educational opportunities that support our members’ growth and understanding. Additionally, we will work in partnership with each other and with stakeholder organizations to amplify our collective efforts to advance health equity policies. Addressing and responding to racism is an urgent public health crisis and nurses are vital to the solution.

For more information, visit the [ANA](#) and the [Academy](#) Websites.

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About the American Nurses Association

The [American Nurses Association](#) (ANA) is the premier organization representing the interests of the nation's 4 million registered nurses. ANA advances the nursing profession by fostering high standards of nursing practice, promoting a safe and ethical work environment, bolstering the health and wellness of nurses, and advocating on health care issues that affect nurses and the public. ANA is at the forefront of improving the quality of health care for all. For more information, visit www.nursingworld.org.

For high-resolution images of the ANA logo or photos of ANA leadership, please [click here](#).

About the American Academy of Nursing

The [American Academy of Nursing](#) serves the public by advancing health policy and practice through the generation, synthesis, and dissemination of nursing knowledge. Academy Fellows are inducted into the organization for their extraordinary contributions to improve health locally and globally. With more than 2,800 Fellows, the Academy represents nursing’s most accomplished leaders in policy, research, administration, practice, and academia.