



American Academy of Nursing Statement

Racism Affects Health and Wellness and It Must Be Addressed

June 1, 2020

The American Academy of Nursing (Academy) mourns the death of George Floyd and stands with those across the country calling for action to change structures and policies that have enabled and permitted senseless violence to occur. His death, and those of others before him, is a tragic reminder of the stark inequities and systemic racism that persist today. Violence, discrimination, and racism have a direct impact on determinants of health, exacerbate health inequities, and can lead to long-term trauma.

Nursing places at the center of our care the highest commitment to achieving health equity, reducing disparities, and fully respecting human dignity. Nurses work every day to save lives and act as a voice for those with no voice in their communities. Continued acts of aggression and excessive force against African American communities, a result of unjust systemic inequities these communities face, cannot be tolerated. It is not one incident. Repeated acts, over time, have an insidious, devastating impact on individuals, families, and communities, directly impacting the attainment of well-being— both physically and mentally.

Racial disparities are present across illness and disease, impacting public health. We see it as the coronavirus pandemic has illuminated persistent challenges based on social determinants of health— where people live and work— that impact access to care and care delivery. It is yet another example that exposes disparities harshly, laying bare our divisions. The body of evidence that helps explain these inequities has grown over time and demands local, state, and national attention for real progress. Substantive change needs to occur and policies must be enacted to hinder the reoccurrence of these unrelenting injustices. Without action, more lives will be lost and unnecessary suffering will continue.

With heavy hearts and sorrow, the Academy reinforces our firm commitment to reducing health inequities and eradicating disparities. As a profession, nurses heal through science, evidence, and compassion. We must not only work to eliminate systemic and institutional racism, personal racism, and unconscious bias, but we must also work to increase the diversity within our own profession and not succumb to the institutional structures and processes that can block openness and prevent change.

Eileen Sullivan-Marx, PhD, RN, FAAN
President
American Academy of Nursing