

On the Table for Mental Health



Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Mental Health

Racial- and ethnic-disparities in mental healthcare access, utilization rates, and outcomes continue to persist. Many factors play a role in this complex issue including barriers to service access, discriminatory policies, individual and systemic bias, social determinants of health and stigma related to mental health conditions and services.

Key Facts

- Blacks and Hispanics have lower rates of depression than whites yet are likely to experience depression in a more persistent manner.ⁱ
- Racial and ethnic minorities suffer an extremely high burden of disability as a result of mental disorders.ⁱⁱ
- Suicide rates are roughly two times higher for black children compared with white children.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Research and information regarding minority mental health is severely lacking – this has not changed in a decade.^{iv}

Possible Discussion Questions

- Have you been able to access the mental health and substance abuse services that you or your family need? If not, what were the barriers?
- Have providers you have worked with delivered services to you that are culturally-responsive and free-of discrimination and harmful bias?
- How has your cultural background and/or upbringing impacted your view of mental health conditions and treatment?
- Do you or your organization track and use data related to racial- and ethnic-populations to understand the needs, utilization rates and access issues for diverse populations? What more can your organization do to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in mental health?
- How has systemic oppression and historical injustices contributed to racial- and ethnic-disparities in mental health?

What You Can Do to Help Reduce Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Mental Health

1. Continue to talk about racial and ethnic disparities in mental health at your home, work, and community.
2. Examine how your cultural background impacts your biases and view of mental health conditions and treatment services.
3. Advocate for and support policies that improve access to and quality of mental healthcare service for diverse populations.
4. Demand research that directly applies to minority populations examining the complexities and intersections of multiple statuses/identities
5. Learn about how discrimination, bias, adverse childhood experiences and other social determinants of health contribute to racial and ethnic disparities in mental health.

About The Kennedy Forum

Just as President Kennedy rallied the nation to dream big and set audacious goals 50 years ago, The Kennedy Forum in Illinois is working toward lasting change in the way mental health and addictions are considered and treated. Our mission is to end stigma against mental health and substance use disorders in both attitudes and practice. We believe that strong, bold leadership, strategic collaboration with partners and concerted action, it is possible to build a future with a health system that fully recognizes that the brain is part of the body and all persons are treated with dignity. Join us at www.thekennedyforumillinois.org

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ⁱ American Psychological Association. Mental Health Disparities: Diverse Populations. Retrieved from <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/mental-health-facts>

ⁱⁱ American Psychological Association. Mental Health Disparities: Diverse Populations. Retrieved from <https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/cultural-competency/education/mental-health-facts>

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^{iv} National Alliance on Mental Illness. Disparities within Minority Mental Health Care. Retrieved from: <https://nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-Blog/July-2017/Disparities-Within-Minority-Mental-Health-Care>