

AMWA's Commitment Statement Against Racism

The murder of George Floyd and the overt and systemic violence perpetrated against Black people in the United States on a daily basis is unconscionable. Our country was built on a foundation of such violence.¹ As physicians and future physicians, we at the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA) are outraged by the brutal murder of George Floyd. His murder and the murders of countless Black people are ultimately the result of deeply entrenched institutionalized racist practices that have persisted for centuries. Silence has caused even further harm by being complicit in perpetuating racism, in particular anti-Black racism. We hereby acknowledge our past silence. As a medical organization we are speaking out and making a commitment to do our part collectively and individually to dismantle systemic racism.

As physicians and students of medicine, we recognize that police brutality is a public health crisis that must stop. Violence perpetrated by law enforcement is more prevalent in Black and Brown communities.² Black people are 3 times more likely to be killed by police and 1.3 times more likely to be unarmed compared to white people.³ But there is little to no accountability for police brutality. Between 2013 and 2019, 99% of killings by police failed to result in criminal charges for the officers involved.³

Systemic racism in America and the police brutality resulting from it are public health crises. As medical professionals we have an ethical obligation to speak out against injustice, brutality, and marginalization. Police brutality is rooted in centuries of systemic racism and is but one manifestation. Historic and ongoing disparities due to racist policies and structural barriers that systematically deny equitable access to quality healthcare, housing, education, transportation, and food manifest as disparate health outcomes.⁴ This intersection is exemplified by the disproportionate effects of COVID-19 on Black people in this country that have been extensively documented. According to CDC data, the age-adjusted death rate for the non-Hispanic Black population is 1.2 times higher than for their white counterparts⁵.

AMWA acknowledges the history behind the grief, anger, and fear felt by our Black members and colleagues, which has been further exacerbated at this time. While acknowledgement does not undo injustice, bearing witness to its harm instructs our resolve and commitment to work towards meaningful change. Together, we are one body of women physicians and students who have committed to progress for ourselves, our patients and our community. We acknowledge our obligation as physicians and students of medicine to speak out against racism, hatred, and violence in all of its forms and specifically the racism that Black physicians and trainees face.

Racism is one of the most urgent public health crises that we face, and we commit to addressing it through the following actions:

- Review and where necessary, update our organizational policies to ensure that they are anti-racist.

- Incorporate a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) lens, with a focus on anti-racism, into each of our committees and initiatives with the goal of preventing and undoing racism.
- Advocate for policies and actions that eliminate racism within our healthcare system.
- Advocate for the inclusion, in medical schools and residency programs, of a curriculum on social determinants of health, impact of racism on health, and racism in medicine.⁶
- Deconstruct the notion of race as a biological determinant in health, science, and medicine.^{6,7}
- Expand opportunities for Black women to become physicians and realize their career aspirations.
- Advocate for law enforcement accountability and transparency in reporting and banning of deadly force as a restraint method (e.g. neck restraints).
- Advocate for accountability at the institutional, state, and national level.
- Advocate for government recognition of racism as a public health crisis at both the state and federal levels and for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the National Institutes of Health to commit to studying the health effects of racism.
- Provide training to physicians and students on racism, bias, and active allyship.
- Build a curriculum for physicians and students who do not identify as BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color) to learn and participate in antiracism work.

We will evaluate our own behaviors, policies, curricula, practices, and biases to ensure that we are being anti-racist in our words and actions. But we know that words alone are not enough; our actions must reflect our values. In honoring the memory of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmed Aubrey, Eric Garner, Trayvon Martin, and so many others, both named and unnamed, AMWA is committing to being anti-racist in all that we say and do.

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