

Health Disparities & Children's Mental Health

- Health disparities are differences in diseases, conditions, and health outcomes based on race, ethnicity, gender, education level, income level, disability or geographic location.
- Research shows that a large proportion of youth of color do not receive the mental health services they need, and that utilization rates are lower than for European American youthⁱ.
- When youth of color do receive treatment, they are more likely to stop treatment early, attend fewer sessions, and show less clinical improvement than European American youthⁱⁱ.
- Even when receiving evidence-based treatments, dropout rates for African American and other youth of color are often higher than for European American youthⁱⁱⁱ.

What has been contributing to disparities in health care?

- Racial and ethnic disparities are deeply rooted in American culture because of the great injustices that people of color have experienced since the beginning of American history: from slavery of Africans to the conquest of Natives' land, to the treatment of undocumented immigrants today^{iv}.
- Disparities are found in every sector of American society, and show in differences in income, access to information, cultural traditions and social structures.
- One of the mental health system's biggest weaknesses has been the failure to factor in the critical role that culture plays in the design and implementation of mental health services to communities of color^v.

What needs to be done to reduce health disparities?

- Firstly, it will take a broad movement (education, advocacy) to unlearn the biased assumptions about race and ethnicity that contribute to the structural racism within our society today.
- There needs to be a diverse health care workforce that represents the backgrounds of the communities they are serving. A critical segment of this workforce are parent support providers, who are family members of children with mental health challenges, and provide peer support to families currently struggling to get help for their children.
- We need to make better use of research methods that utilize the strengths and needs of communities, including practice-based evidence, community-defined evidence, and patient-centered research.
- The right data need to be gathered about communities to let policymakers know what the community needs. This data should include demographics (race, ethnicity, gender) and the

things that impact our health, including poor housing, unsafe neighborhoods, lack of access to fresh foods, polluted environments and personal behaviors.

ⁱ Huey, SJ Jr, Polo, AJ. (2010). Assessing the Effects of Evidence-Based Psychotherapies with Ethnic Minority Youths.

ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} NAMBHA (2008). Blueprint for the National Network to Eliminate Disparities in Behavioral Health (NNED).

^v USDHHS (2001). Surgeon General's Supplemental Report, Mental Health: Culture Race and Ethnicity.