

RACIAL & HEALTH EQUITY: Make It Your Business

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Learn: Why Should We Focus on Racism, and Not Race?

Unfortunately, all too often, people and institutions still look at race – and not racism – as the cause of health inequities. There is no biological basis to health inequities. Racism, not race, is a root cause of health inequities. Racism keeps BIPOC from having access to healthy foods, quality health care and affordable housing in their communities.

Racism directly impacts the health and well-being of Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC). Research shows that racism leads to poor health outcomes, higher rates of illness and early death for BIPOC. Countless studies have demonstrated the link between racism and chronic stress, high blood pressure, diabetes and lower life expectancy.

Let's look at two examples:



BIPOC Communities and the Coronavirus Infection

Across the nation, BIPOC are more likely to get infected with and die from COVID-19. BIPOC are not simply more vulnerable to COVID-19 because of their race, rather, we see higher rates of infection because BIPOC have experienced decades of underinvestment, segregation, lack of access to health care and racism. BIPOC have less access to health care and work frontline jobs at a higher rate than white people. This increases the risk of exposure to coronavirus. BIPOC communities also have less access to clean water, quality health care and healthy, affordable foods compared to white communities.



Mortality Rates for Black Mothers

According to the CDC, Black mothers, across all income levels, die at three to four times the rate of white mothers in the United States.

Up until recently, medical researchers and health care providers blamed genetics as the cause of disparate rates of maternal mortality for Black women. In other words, they saw race as the cause.

Medical researchers, social scientists and doctors now recognize that racism is the root cause of high maternal mortality rates for Black mothers – not race. Black women experience significantly higher rates of chronic stress, as a result of racism and discrimination, than their white counterparts. Research indicates that chronic stress caused by discrimination plays a critical role in both maternal and infant mortality. Black women also face institutional racism and sexism in health care, which results in a lower quality of prenatal care and diminished maternal health.

When we focus on race, rather than racism, we not only ignore the deep effects of racism in our society, but we also limit our ability to take action and work to create equitable health outcomes. Once we start to recognize how racism impacts the health and well-being of BIPOC, we can work to create a healthier and more equitable future for all.

Reflect: How Do You Consider Race and Racism?



What do you think are the consequences when media or research focuses on race rather than racism?

Why do you think some institutions will focus on race and not racism?

What happens when we start to shift the narrative to focus on racism rather than race? Who benefits and is anything lost?

Change: Steps Toward Progress



Acknowledge That Racism Exists

- Even if you don't directly experience racism, racism is real and has life or death consequences for Black, Indigenous and people of color in our society. A first step in recognizing racism is acknowledging that racism exists and is present in all aspects of life in America.

- **Read:**

- "White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide" by Carol Anderson
- "Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America" by Ibram X. Kendi
- "Tears We Cannot Stop: A Sermon to White America" by Michael Eric Dyson
- "So You Want to Talk About Race" by Ijeoma Oluo

- **Listen:** <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/podcasts/broken-justice>

- **Watch:** [PBS Series: Unnatural Causes... is inequality making us sick?](#)



Listen to and Learn From People Who Have Different Lived Experiences Than Yourself

- Actively listen when Black, Indigenous and people of color talk about everyday racism and white privilege.
- Try not to dismiss the lived experiences of others, just because they may challenge your own experience or what you have been taught.
- While it is important to listen to and learn from Black, Indigenous and people of color, remember, that it's not their job to educate you on racism. You still have to do the work to address racism in yourself, your family and community.

- **Learn:**

- <http://www.lookdifferent.org/different-day>
- [11-Step Guide to Understanding Race, Racism, and White Privilege](#)



Recognize Racial Bias in Media

- Bias and racism are pervasive in news and media. Start to critically examine what you read, watch and listen to.
- Ask yourself, is this news story talking about race, when the real issue is racism?
- Seek out diverse voices and opinions.
- **Learn:**
 - [“The Racial Divide on New Coverage, and Why Representation Matter”](#)
 - [“How Implicit Bias Works in Journalism”](#)
 - [“Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice that Shapes What We See, Think, and Do”](#) by Jennifer L. Eberhardt

