

APA Official Actions

Position Statement on Addressing Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities in Substance Use Disorder Treatment in the Criminal Legal System

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Issue: In the United States, the prevalence of substance use and substance use disorders (SUDs) is estimated to be essentially equal across lines of race and ethnicity (1). However, Black, Indigenous, and other people of color are prosecuted and incarcerated for substance-related offenses at higher rates than their white counterparts (2), who have greater access to more effective legal representation and are more likely to be offered drug court or drug treatment in lieu of incarceration (3).

While SUDs are overrepresented among the incarcerated population, SUD treatment in U.S. correctional facilities is scant and infrequently evidence-based, further exacerbating SUD-related health disparities among racial and ethnic minority groups (4,5,8). Addressing racial and ethnic disparities related to SUD treatment in the criminal legal system is crucial to mitigating the disproportionate burden of substance use-related harm and social inequities experienced by these communities (4,6,7).

APA Position:

Federal and state policy changes that promote diversion to treatment in lieu of incarceration for substance-related offences are needed to address inequities and improve access to evidence-based treatments for substance use disorders in the criminal legal system regardless of ethnicity, race, gender or sexuality.

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