

Black mental health and wellness matters

Resources for culturally competent and sensitive care



This is an extraordinarily challenging time for Black Americans. The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is ravaging their health and wellness at a higher rate than for white Americans. At the same time, Black Americans are coping with the very visible police killing of George Floyd, along with a series of other brutality cases that underscore systemic injustices and threaten their physical and emotional well-being.

There are many components of systemic racism that have detrimental impacts on Black Americans' mental and physical health and overall wellness. They include factors leading to misdiagnosis and inadequate treatment, the impact of the stress of living within systemic racism, and barriers to accessing care. The effects on Black Americans speak to the need for connections to culturally competent, sensitive care and self-healing resources.

Barriers matter

- **Provider bias and inequality of care can lead to misdiagnosis and poorer quality care.** Black women, for example, are more likely to experience and mention physical symptoms that correlate to mental health problems. A health care provider who is not culturally competent might not recognize these as symptoms, and currently only 6.2% of psychologists, 5.6% of advanced-practice psychiatric nurses, 12.6% of social workers and 21.3% of psychiatrists are members of minority groups.
- **Socio-economic factors such as limited financial resources, no insurance coverage, etc., can hinder access to treatment.** Only about 30% of Black adults with mental illness receive treatment, compared to the U.S. average of 43%.
- **There is a stigma associated with mental illness.** There is a lack of information and a misunderstanding about mental health, as well as shame and stigma within the Black community associated with mental illness.
- **Other common barriers include: the importance of family privacy, lack of knowledge regarding available treatments, and denial of mental health problems.** Concerns about stigma, medications, not receiving appropriate information about services, and dehumanizing services have also been reported to hinder Black people from accessing mental health services.

Racism matters

- The chronic stress associated with being a target or potential target of discrimination can lead to physical and mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, obesity, high blood pressure and substance abuse. And across racial and ethnic groups, people who say they have faced discrimination rate their stress levels higher than those who say they have not experienced discrimination.
- The death rate for Black Americans is higher than for white Americans for heart disease, stroke, cancer, asthma, influenza and pneumonia, diabetes, HIV/AIDS and homicide.
- Of the thousands of hate crime offenses reported in the United States, nearly 60% were motivated by bias related to race, ethnicity or ancestry.
- Microaggressions — everyday verbal, nonverbal and environmental slights, snubs or insults — whether intentional or unintentional — also have been shown to have serious consequences for the mental and physical health of Black people and other people of color.

Access matters

- Only one in three Black Americans who needs mental health care receives it.
- Compared with the general population, Black Americans are less likely to be offered either evidence-based medication therapy or psychotherapy. Compared with white people, Black people are:
 - Less likely to receive guideline-consistent care
 - Less frequently included in research
 - More likely to use emergency rooms or primary care (rather than mental health specialists)
- Black people with mental health conditions — particularly schizophrenia, bipolar disorders and other psychoses — are more likely to be incarcerated than people of other races.
- Compared with white youth, youth of color with behavioral health issues are more readily referred to the juvenile justice system than to specialty primary care. People of color also are more likely to end up in the juvenile justice system due to harsh disciplinary suspension and expulsion practices in schools.

Signs and symptoms matter

It's important to understand that it is normal to have emotional reactions to the acute traumas of the recent events of COVID-19 and the multitude of Black deaths. People may be struggling with the following:

- Sleep disturbances
- Expressions of grief, fear, anxiousness and/or anxiety
- Difficulty with concentration
- Feeling sad, angry, hopeless, helpless, fatigued, overwhelmed, and/or withdrawn
- Physical symptoms, such as gastrointestinal discomfort, headaches, dizziness, pain or enhanced pain
- Post-traumatic symptoms of recurrent nightmares, fear from associations with reminders of the recent traumas, hypervigilance

For some people, the symptoms may be more severe. If they appear to last longer than a month without any resolution through self-care measures, then seeking professional help is advised.

Resources matter

To help your employees get started finding the care they or their loved ones may need, here are some culturally competent resources. Resources provided are publicly available and are not directly affiliated with Optum. Please check your specific plan to learn whether the provider you select is included in the Optum network.

- **The Association of Black Psychologists** — A listing comprised of Black psychologists who own and operate their own private-practice business or are employed as therapists, and have elected to participate in this directory. abpsi.org/contact-us/find_psych/

- **Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective** — A collective aimed at removing the barriers that Black people experience getting access to or staying connected with emotional health care and healing. beam.community/
- **Black Mental Health Alliance (BMHA)** — Through an expansive database of culturally competent and patient-centered licensed mental health professionals, BMHA offers confidential referrals for those seeking mental health services. blackmentalhealth.com/connect-with-a-therapist/
- **Black Mental Wellness** — Provides access to evidence-based information and resources about mental health and behavioral health topics from a Black perspective. blackmentalwellness.com/
- **Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation** — Founded to raise awareness of mental illness and encourage treatment in the Black community. Offers free COVID-19 virtual therapy support. Also provides a directory of mental health providers and programs serving Black people. borislhensonfoundation.org/resource-guide/
- **Ebony's Mental Health Resources** — A growing list of Black mental health resources by state as compiled by Ebony magazine. ebony.com/life/black-mental-health-resources/
- **Inclusive Therapists** — Directory of therapists and resources that enables you to search for specific preferred criteria, such as cultural knowledge, languages spoken, therapeutic approach, insurance, sliding scale, etc. inclusivetherapists.com/
- **Melanin and Mental Health** — Provides free resources and connects people with culturally competent clinicians. Promotes the growth and healing of diverse communities through its website, online directory and events. melaninandmentalhealth.com/
- **National Alliance for Mental Illness** — The nation's largest grassroots mental health organization dedicated to building better lives for the millions of Americans affected by mental illness. Provides online resources and tools, as well as a free Helpline to answer questions, offer support and provide practical next steps. Call **1-800-950-NAMI (6264)**, Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. ET, or send an email to info@nami.org.
- **National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network** — A healing justice organization committed to transforming mental health for queer and trans people of color. Provides a directory to help queer and trans people of color locate queer and trans people of color mental health practitioners across the country. nqttcn.com/directory
- **Psychology Today** — Directory of Black therapists in the United States, searchable by city, ZIP code or name. psychologytoday.com/us/therapists/african-american
- **Therapy for Black Girls** — Provides a searchable directory of culturally competent mental health professionals in your area. providers.therapyforblackgirls.com/

Note: If you or someone you know is thinking about suicide, seek help right away. If someone is in immediate danger, call 911 — or go to the closest emergency room. To talk with a trained counselor, you can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline anytime at **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**.

Sources:

apa.org/topics/discrimination

apa.org/topics/kids-discrimination

cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/racial-ethnic-minorities.html

cdc.gov/violenceprevention/suicide/fastfact.html

justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics

justice.gov/hatecrimes/preventing-hate-crimes-your-community

justice.gov/hatecrimes/hate-crime-statistics#piechart-description

This program should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 if you are in the United States or the local emergency services phone number if you are outside the United States, or go to the nearest accident and emergency department. This program is not a substitute for a doctor's or professional's care. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against Optum or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This program and all its components, in particular services to family members below the age of 16, may not be available in all locations and is subject to change without prior notice. Experience and/or educational levels of Employee Assistance Program resources may vary based on contract requirements or country regulatory requirements Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.

Optum® is a registered trademark of Optum, Inc. in the U.S. and other jurisdictions. All other brand or product names are trademarks or registered marks or the property of their respective owners. Optum is an equal opportunity employer.

© 2020 Optum, Inc. All rights reserved. WF2946990 203842-072020