



Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Campaign Toolkit

Addressing the Mental Health Crisis in the U.S.:
Investing in Support Systems and Educational
Programs for Mental Health

The Environmental Justice Coalition

Executive Directors: Catherine Callinan

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Background

Mental illnesses are diagnosable mental disorders that affect thinking, emotions, and/or behavior and can cause great distress and/or problems in social, work, or family life. For instance, mental illnesses such as anxiety can create irrational intense fear or worry in a person that can elevate an individual's heart rate, cause rapid breathing, and make the individual feel sick or dizzy. Additionally, other mental illnesses such as depression may involve feelings of apathy, numbness, hopelessness, and fatigue. All mental illnesses can interfere with normal functioning and lead to chronic pain or fatigue, instability in life, incarceration, or suicide. Mental illness is common and 1 in 5 U.S adults (aged 18 or older) have a mental illness, however in communities of color and other minority populations, treatment is often more difficult to acquire (American Psychiatric Association, 2018). To elaborate, people of color (POC) face numerous barriers to access quality health care, including historical mistrust of the healthcare system, stigma, lack of cultural knowledge among providers, insurance, and poverty. For instance, black people have experienced neglect and inhumane treatments within the medical field, which has bred distrust and a hesitancy to utilize current health care programs. Demonstratively, in the 1960s, black men were more and more frequently being diagnosed with schizophrenia, which transitioned from the docile diagnosis of white housewives to a violent and aggressive disorder of black men who aligned themselves with activist groups such as Black Panther. This narrative that black individual's psyche was ill and aggressive was used to justify police brutality and mass incarceration. Nowadays, similar patterns can be observed with three times the number of people with severe mental illnesses in prison than in hospitals (Counseling Today, 2020). A majority of those individuals are black people, who are overrepresented in prisons: Black people make up 13% of the population yet nearly 40% of the prison population (Mental Health America). Additionally, insurance difficulties prevent many minority groups from accessing help. People of color are 2 ½ times more likely to be uninsured than non-Hispanic white individuals and even then insured psychiatrists rarely accept federal insurance. Only 43% accept Medicaid, which makes it increasingly more difficult for individuals living in poverty to pay out-of-pocket (Center for American Progress, 2020). Moreover, according to the Center for American Progress, more than half of U.S counties have no psychiatrist and 37% have no psychologist. Finally, language barriers, lack of diversity in providers, cultural insensitivity, a lack of knowledge of minority groups' needs, and dangerous stereotypes have led to a worse health care for minority groups, especially people of color, and have discouraged many from reaching out to help. Mental illnesses can have serious long-term effects, and yet many minority groups are continuously discouraged and prevented from receiving necessary care, which is detailed by the National Alliance of Mental Illnesses:

- People with depression are 40% more likely to develop cardiovascular and metabolic diseases than the general population.
- 23.3% of Asians, 32.9% of African Americans, and 33.9% of Hispanics receive annual treatment while 50.3% of non-Hispanic white individuals did.

- About 3 in 5 people (63%) with a history of mental illness don't receive care while in state and federal prisons.

This toolkit will help explain and contextualize the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2021 and provide resources for you to help it get passed.

Summary of Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2021

The Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2021 addresses the need for better mental health care facilities and funding for people of color, especially youth, by establishing funds for mental health care programs and facilities that primarily serve people of color. In total, the bill allows for \$805 million in grants and other funding for research, building competent mental health care teams, and forming outreach programs to reduce stigma. The bill details support methods for these organizations through two main sections:

1. Health Equity and Accountability
2. Other Provisions

Details of Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2021

The Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act was introduced by Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman (D-NJ-12) in the House of Representatives on March 1, 2021 in the first session of the 117th congress as H.R. 1475. Its purpose is “to address mental health issues for youth, particularly youth of color, and for other purposes.” The bill has passed in the House and is in the second stage of the legislative process.

1. Primarily, the bill serves to establish a grant program for mental health organizations dedicated to supporting people of color and the requirements for the grant. To elaborate, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) awards grants to federally-qualified health centers, rural health clinics, or behavioral health programs serving a high number of racial and ethnic minority groups to form multi-professional health care teams that can provide scientifically-based behavioral health care. In order to provide this service, the bill authorizes \$20,000,000 for each of the first 5 years after the enactment of the bill. The awarded grants can be used by national organizations to establish advisory boards, committees, and public-input workshops to create best practices and skills/experiences to educate and reduce mental health disparities among racial and ethnic minority groups as well as spreading these practices and core competencies to health professional educational programs of students in the professions of social work, community health workers, peer wellness specialists, and undergraduate and graduate health professionals training programs nationwide. In addition, \$10 million for each year through 2022 to 2026 will be authorized to establish an outreach and education method to minimize stigma and promote behavioral and mental health in accordance with advocacy and behavioral and mental health organization supporting racial and ethnic minority groups. Less than 1 year after the enactment of this part of the bill, a report on the success of the method will be written by the Secretary and given to Congress to make public. Lastly, along with other amounts allotted to National Institutes of Health and the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities,

\$100,000,000 will be given to the National Institutes of Health to build community relations and support clinical research on disparities in physical and mental health each year from 2022 to 2026 along with \$650,000,000 allotted to the National Institute of Minority Health and Health Disparities for each year. Earlier than 6 months after the enactment of this act, the National Institute of Health shall enter an arrangement with the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (or, if the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine declines the offer, another appropriate entity will be requested) to conduct a study about mental health disparities including the mental disorders in such minority groups and the effects of community violence, adverse childhood experiences, systemic racism, and other psychological traumas on mental disorders in such groups. A report of the studies will be submitted to Congress.

2. The second section primarily focuses on reauthorizing the minority fellowship program with funds of \$25,000,000 for each year from 2022 to 2026 as well as ordering the Secretary to conduct research on smartphone and social media use by adolescents and the effects on health, development, and the disparities in minority and underserved communities no later than 1 year after the enactment of the Act. Before 5 years after the enactment of the Act, the report of the research shall be given to Congress and made public.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/1475>

Templates to Contact Legislators about Supporting the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2021

How to Find Your Representatives and Senators

To locate your state's US representative's website and contact information, click on the link here: <https://www.house.gov/representatives>. Search for your state and congressional district. If you do not know your congressional district, you can enter your ZIP code and find your representative here: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>. Remember that each state has a varying number of representatives based on the state's population.

To locate your state's Senator's website and contact information, click on the link here: <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm>. Select your state from the "Choose a state" drop-down menu. Remember that each state has only two senators.

Email Template

Copy the email template below and enter all of the information that pertains to you and your state in the bracketed portions of the text.

Dear [Title] [Last Name],

My name is [Name], and I am emailing you to ask for your support of the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2021 and to consider cosponsoring the act in Congress if you have not already. In the U.S., 1 in 5 adults are diagnosed with a mental illness, and while mental illnesses are treatable without the proper care the individual's symptoms could worsen and become detrimental to their physical health as well, which is why communities of color and other minority groups are most vulnerable to the severe effects of mental illnesses. Minority communities face barriers in accessing quality mental health care due to language barriers, insurance issues, racism, a lack of diversity and cultural knowledge, and short supply of mental health care providers. Approximately 23.3% of Asians, 32.9% of African Americans, and 33.9% of Hispanics receive annual treatment while 50.3% of non-Hispanic white individuals do due to these difficulties.

With your support of the bill, organizations that support racial and ethnic minority groups can receive funds to further their work and social workers and health care providers can be educated in the best practices to reduce stigma and mental health disparities in order to uplift and protect communities of color.

Thank you in advance for your time, consideration, and support of the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2021.

Sincerely,

[Name]

Phone Template

When gathering the contact information about your House Representative and Senator, note down their office's cell phone number, which can be used to call them. If you choose to call, you can use the phone calling template below to speak to their office and arrange a meeting with your House Representative or Senator.

Hello, my name is [insert your name], and I am a constituent from [insert congressional district or city and state]. I am calling to ask [senator or representative's name] to support the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2021. 1 in 5 U.S adults are diagnosed with a mental illness and yet only 23.3% of Asians, 32.9% of African Americans, and 33.9% of Hispanics receive annual treatment compared to the 50.3% of non-Hispanic who do. Mistrust in the healthcare system after years of abuse and neglect, unreliable insurance, language barriers, a lack of diversity and cultural sensitivity, inaccessible health care systems, stigma, and other similar reasons have led communities of color to receive less mental health care. For this reason, while people of color statistically receive fewer mental health diagnoses for a mental illness they suffer from the most severe symptoms. Through the support of this bill, improved, evidence-based training can be spread to students of the healthcare profession to teach the best practices to reduce stigma and educate on the needs of minority groups as well as fund organizations currently supporting a high proportion of racial and ethnic minorities.

Please vote in favor of passing the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2021 to the next stage in the legislative process. Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to those struggling in the U.S.

Other Ways to Support the Pursuing Equity in Mental Health Act of 2021

Petitions to Sign

- “Mental Health Equality for All”
<https://www.change.org/p/together-we-can-create-mental-health-equality-for-all>
- “Tell Congress to Fund Mental Health Research”
<https://nami.quorum.us/campaign/30043/>
- “You Can Influence Policymakers”
<https://nami.quorum.us/campaign/30044/>

Places to Donate

- Loveland Therapy Fund https://www.flipcause.com/secure/cause_pdetails/NzU4MzM=
- National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network (NQTTCN)
<https://nqttn.com/en/donate/>
- Therapy for Black Girls <https://donorbox.org/therapyforblackgirls>
- Sista Afya Community Mental Wellness <https://donorbox.org/sistaafya-fund>
- Inclusive Therapist <https://www.inclusivetherapists.com/support>
- Ethel’s Club <https://ifundwomen.com/projects/ethels-club>
- Boris Lawrence Henson Foundation <https://borislhensonfoundation.org/donate>
- Dive in Well <https://ifundwomen.com/projects/dive-in-well>
- Heal Haus <https://www.healhaus.com/donate-2/>
- Black Girl in Om <https://www.blackgirlinom.com/support>
- Asian Mental Health Project <https://asianmentalhealthproject.com/donate/>

Support Services for Mental Health to Volunteer With

- NAMI-NYC
- Mental Health America Affiliate Resource Center
- Crisis Text Line
- MINDS Foundation

Videos to Learn More about Mental Health Disparities

- “Black Mental Health Matters”
https://www.ted.com/talks/phillip_j_roundtree_black_mental_health_matters
- “Mental Health Disparities for People of Color”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4vW4YCCe15ZU>
- “Identifying New Directions in Mental Health Disparities Research: Innovations with a Multidimensional Lens - Day One, Part One”

<https://www.nimh.nih.gov/news/media/2020/identifying-new-directions-in-mental-health-disparities-research-innovations-with-a-multidimensional-lens-day-one-part-one>

- “Failing Another Test in Addressing Mental Health Disparities”
<https://www.nami.org/Blogs/NAMI-s-Ask-the-Expert/2020/NAMI-s-Ask-the-Expert-We-binar-Failing-Another-Test-in-Addressing-Mental-Health-Disparities>
- “Mental Health For All By Involving All”
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzm4gpAKrBk>

Helpful Articles to Read about Mental Health and Mental Health Disparities

- “Understanding Barrier to Minority Mental Health Care”
<https://nursing.usc.edu/blog/discrimination-bad-health-minority-mental-healthcare/>
- “Decolonizing Mental Health”
<https://calgaryjournal.ca/more/calgaryvoices/4982-decolonizing-mental-health-the-importance-of-an-oppression-focused-mental-health-system.html/>
- “The Budding Field of Climate-Aware Therapy Must Be Decolonized To Serve BIPOC Communities” <https://www.wellandgood.com/climate-aware-therapy/>
- “5 Benefits of Therapy for First Gen Communities”
<https://mywellbeing.com/therapy-101/minority-mental-health-awareness-month>
- “These Instagram Accounts Want to Make Therapy Less White”
<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/estelletang/therapy-people-of-color-instagram>
- “Mental Illnesses” <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/mental-illness>
- “Mental Health: Types of Mental Illnesses”
<https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/mental-health-types-illness>

Get Involved with the Environmental Justice Coalition

The Environmental Justice Coalition is the first grassroots, youth-led movement mobilizing the next generation of activists in the fight for intersectional environmental justice and uplifting BIPOC, low-income, and marginalized communities most impacted by environmental racism and injustices through political advocacy, policy development, community organizing, educational initiatives, and content creation. We are working towards a future in which there is fair and equal treatment, equitable distribution of resources, and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexuality, or income level in the development, implementation, and enforcement of sustainable environmental laws, regulations, and policies on the local, state, and federal level.

For position descriptions, eligibility requirements, sample projects, and application forms, please visit our [Job Board](#) to learn more about joining our executive team, enrolling in our fellowship program, or becoming a staff writer and reach out to team@environmentaljusticecoalition.org with any questions!

Follow the Movement

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LinkedIn: [Environmental Justice Coalition](#)

Medium: medium.com/environmental-justice-coalition

Twitter: [@envjustco](#)

Linktree: linktr.ee/environmentaljusticecoalition

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