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**ASAM Issues Public Policy Statement on
Advancing Racial Justice in Addiction Medicine**

Nation's leading association of addiction specialist physicians and other clinicians issues the first in a series of statements reflecting ASAM's effort to recognize, understand, and counteract systemic racism

Rockville, MD – Today the [American Society of Addiction Medicine](#) (ASAM) issued a [Public Policy Statement on Advancing Racial Justice in Addiction Medicine](#), the first in a series of statements on addressing the systemic racism that permeates drug policy and impacts both the development of addiction as well as access to treatment for millions of Americans with substance use disorder (SUD). Recognizing systemic racism as a social determinant of health, the public policy statement released today is part of ASAM's effort to recognize, understand, and counteract the effects of America's historical, pervasive, and continuing systemic racism as it relates to addiction prevention, early intervention, diagnosis, treatment, and recovery.

Historically, drug policy in the United States has helped to perpetuate systemic racism more than public health. The statement outlines the history of systemic racism in drug policy, highlights the contemporary consequences, and makes several recommendations, including:

- Addiction medicine professionals should examine their own motivations, biases, and practices related to racially oppressed patients to deliver equitable, compassionate, and anti-racism-informed medical care to all patients.
- Addiction medicine training, residency, and fellowship programs and providers of addiction-related continuing medical education (CME) should review their curricula to identify gaps related to trauma-informed care, structural competency, and racial understanding.
- Addiction medicine professionals should actively advocate for policies that lead to a more diverse addiction treatment workforce and should seek opportunities to mentor clinicians from racially oppressed groups in the field. Robust funding should be made available and targeted for scholarships and loan repayment for racially oppressed addiction medicine professionals.
- Addiction medicine professionals should actively advocate for policies that lead to a more equitable allocation of resources to ensure that racially oppressed people at risk of, or with,

addiction have access to evidence-based prevention, early intervention, treatment, and harm reduction services.

“For too long, structural, political, and cultural biases have failed racially oppressed people. In an affront to basic human rights, this has extended into healthcare as well.” said Paul H. Earley, MD, DFASAM, president of ASAM. “Nowhere is systemic racism more evident than in addiction care, where it impacts one’s risk of developing addiction and ability to access to evidence-based addiction treatment services. The time for change is now.”

Addiction involves complex interactions among an individual’s brain circuits, genetics, the environment, and their life experiences, as recognized by [ASAM’s definition of addiction](#). Since racism shapes the environment and life experiences of Black, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, and other racially oppressed and disenfranchised people, it adversely influences both their risk of developing addiction and their access to evidence-based addiction care. Citing numerous scientific studies, the new public policy statement highlights examples of how systemic racism has historically been ingrained in drug policy and addiction medicine, how it continues to affect access to evidence-based addiction treatment, and how it has led to underrepresentation of racially oppressed people in scientific studies.

The goal of this series of public policy statements is to increase structural competency, defined as “the capacity to recognize and respond to health and illness as the downstream effects of broad social, political, and economic structures,” among addiction medicine professionals, public health authorities, policymakers, and others with societal influence or authority. Subsequent statements will address broader public health and social issues and make recommendations for expansive policy and societal change.

“As we continue the conversation about advancing racial justice in America, ASAM will keep advocating for policies and practices that help strengthen and diversify the addiction treatment workforce, increase access to evidence-based care, and eliminate the systemic factors that create and support vast inequities across racial groups,” said Stephen M. Taylor, MD, MPH, DFAPA, FASAM, co-chair of the working group that authored the statement.

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About the American Society of Addiction Medicine

The American Society of Addiction Medicine (ASAM), founded in 1954, is a professional medical society representing over 6,600 physicians, clinicians and associated professionals in the field of addiction medicine. ASAM is dedicated to increasing access and improving the quality of addiction treatment, educating physicians and the public, supporting research and prevention and promoting the appropriate role of physicians in the care of patients with addiction. For more information, visit www.ASAM.org.