



ABPD Statement on Violence, COVID, and Structural Racism in American Society

As directors and faculty of bioethics programs and centers across the United States and Canada, we have dedicated our careers to promoting equitable access to the healthcare system and the fair and ethical delivery of healthcare services. Yet, for too long, we in these bioethics communities have failed to forcefully confront the structural racism embedded in our society. We have not adequately spoken out as a profession about the profound impact of racism on medicine, on public health, on clinical care, and on medical research, despite the centrality of justice as a guiding principle for our field. Today, we commit to changing that, both individually and collectively, through concrete actions to change our field.

We also commit ourselves to renewed attention to the voices of Black, Indigenous, and other colleagues and communities in our health care facilities, academic halls, conference centers, committees, and journals in which bioethics work is traditionally done. Bioethics sees itself as a profession which champions the disenfranchised. However, we have not done nearly enough to champion them within our own ranks. We commit now to doing so for our Black colleagues as well as all underrepresented voices.

The impact of racism is undeniably reflected in the well-recognized health disparities for Black Americans and other communities of color. It has manifested most recently in the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on the Black community in the United States. It is an obligation of our field to identify, oppose, and try to remediate such disparities to the best of our abilities.

We deplore racism and fully support the efforts of peaceful protestors around the United States who are drawing long overdue attention to the gross injustices that have been allowed to fester for generations. As a field, bioethics must acknowledge its role in tolerating those injustices by failing to work to dismantle them.

Statements of solidarity and lamenting past inaction are not enough. We, the undersigned members of the bioethics profession in the United States and Canada, commit to taking concrete steps towards meaningful and lasting transformation. We commit to:

- Listen to and learn from the voices of Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and other colleagues, patients, and the broader community about how to right past wrongs in our field and how to create a more inclusive bioethics moving forward.
- Expand bioethics education for young Black students, as well as other students of historically disadvantaged backgrounds, at the high school, college, and graduate school levels, with the goal of encouraging these students to enter the field or engage bioethics topics as citizens.
- Create opportunities for Black scholars, as well as other students of historically disadvantaged backgrounds, to pursue academic careers in bioethics, and mentor and sponsor students, fellows, and junior faculty from those communities to promote their success in bioethics. Then to support and recruit these scholars, educators, and consultants for leadership positions in bioethics.



- Explicitly recognize and examine violence against Black communities, including gun violence, police brutality, structural racism, and poverty, as medical, mental health, and public health challenges worthy of ethical analysis, research, teaching, and redress.
- Offer more educational and community outreach opportunities to promote understanding of issues at the intersection of bioethics and race.
- Seek out and engage work already being done by Black scholars, as well as those of other underrepresented groups, and invite them to collaborate on and lead scholarly projects, working groups, and academic publications in bioethics and reject opportunities that fail to include diverse voices.
- Prioritize funding opportunities and journal symposia on issues at the intersection of bioethics and race.
- Incorporate racism more fully into our understanding of, and work on, justice in health and health care.
- Promote and encourage empirical work on the ethical implications of race, racism, discrimination, health disparities, and other products of structural racism on medicine, public health, and the provision of healthcare services.
- Ensure that ethics consultants are prepared to recognize and counter racism, including institutional and structural racism and their impacts, as they arise in clinical encounters and in advising on institutional policy.
- Prepare ethics educators to identify and address racism, including institutional and structural racism, in their teaching at every level.
- Reject racism and be actively anti-racist wherever we do our bioethics work, in academic environments, in health care settings, on Institutional Review Boards, when consulting with governmental and non-governmental organizations, in media engagements, and elsewhere.
- Hold each other, and the institutions in which we work, accountable for each of these commitments.

Given the tragic events and responses of the recent past, our attention has been directed primarily to the injustices facing Black Americans. The field of bioethics commits to taking similar steps with members of other historically underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.

We commit ourselves to following the actions enumerated above. It is time for American bioethics to reflect the diversity of people and groups affected by bioethical issues and to address racism and racial injustice as core aspects of bioethics research, teaching, and clinical service.