

Becoming a Part of Social Change

By Cynthia Moreno Tuohy, BSW, NCAC II, CDC III, SAP, NAADAC Executive Director

The past months have placed the glaring inequities faced by people of color, particularly Black people, on display in a way that has not been seen in decades. Society is – for the moment, at least – finally paying attention to the wide range of racism that minority individuals face on a daily basis. We, as addiction professionals, have a duty to our clients, our profession, and our communities to be a part of the social change that is occurring.

How do we affect this social change? We need to begin with listening to develop understanding and awareness. Listening and learning of the history of oppression, privilege, and the effects on individuals, families and communities allows empathy and understanding to develop. We must also assess our own behaviors and make intentional changes. We must be intentional in both our words and our actions in every aspect of our lives to combat the existing institutional racism and strive to be anti-racist; there is no room for neutrality and there is nothing political about a human life.

Lastly, we must constantly evaluate the change. Are our efforts effective? Are they achieving our goals? Are there unintended consequences? What further actions need to be made?

Addiction professionals are a community of people who are passionate about the people we serve. It is widely accepted and understood in our profession that individuals with addictive and mental health disorders have experienced prejudices and stigma. Many of our professionals have engaged in advocacy, education and awareness of these diseases and helped systems in our communities to engage in change to become more aware and supportive of people with addictive and mental health disorders.

People of color, including and perhaps especially Black people, with addictive and mental health disorders face added prejudices and it is vital that we understand the connection between the disparities that continue for the clients that we serve and that we are not yet serving, often due in large part to the disparities in the healthcare system. We are called to be intentional about our voice, our social behaviors, and our actions to be inclusive and take action for social change.

Please join NAADAC in doing so by getting involved in the new committee we have formed on critical issues in the Black community, by listening to the new webinars on Cultural Humility, by donating to the Thurgood Marshall College Fund or getting involved in your own community to educate people about addictive disorders and disparities experienced by people of color, and advocate for opportunities, funding, and social justice for our clients and their families.

Together – we can – and do – make a difference!



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