

Social Injustice and Its Effect on the Addiction Community

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

NAADAC is not blind to the social injustices that are reflected in our communities, in our protests and in the discourse currently happening across the United States, and the world. NAADAC was built on the foundation of justice for those suffering from addiction and their families. NAADAC's Code of Ethics explicitly states, "Addiction Professionals understand and accept their responsibility to ensure the safety and welfare of their client, and to act for the good of each client while exercising respect, sensitivity, and compassion. Providers shall treat each client with dignity, honor, and respect, and act in the best interest of each client." Each of us is bound to look first to the welfare of the client we are serving or plan to serve, and to not allow our own biases or prejudices to stand in the way. If we find that our biases are affecting our behavior and work, we must either seek assistance to understand and to change, or to make the determination that this is not the career for us.

As we are bound to act in the best interest of our clients, we must advocate for measures that will both provide them with appropriate evidence-based care and bolster the workforce that provides that care. It is through advocacy at both the national and local levels that legislation and funding supporting these efforts can be achieved. You are needed now, more than ever, to assist in raising the voice for equal addiction services for all and by persons trained, competent and of the diversity that our clients reflect. Building social justice, equality and parity to make a measurable difference takes commitment, time and focus on these goals. We need to ask ourselves, "What is my part to play in these times?" It may take years to achieve the initiatives we believe to be the rights of those affected by addiction and yet, if not now, when? If not me, who?

As addiction professionals, we need to proactively advocate for public policy initiatives that make a difference to those we serve and to the addiction profession. The following are some of the public policy issues NAADAC is addressing:

- **Continued funding for the Minority Fellowship Program**, which provides tuition and other support for aspiring addiction professionals committed to working with underserved populations, including minority populations. We achieved supplemental funding in the CARES Act and plan to continue to grow this important program that we have been involved with over the last eight years.
- **Funding for advanced education loan forgiveness**, which is now a reality due to the CARES Act, and for the first time, funding for education at the Bachelor's degree level. NAADAC is currently working with the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) on the eligibility requirements of this announcement due out in the summer of 2021.
- **Equality in pay and benefits for addiction counselors**. Many of our addiction counselors and peers across America make a sub-standard

salary and lack benefits. It is essential to build higher salaries, especially in the publicly funded treatment and peer agencies. NAADAC has been advocating on behalf of this workforce before SAMHSA and Congress.

- **Infrastructure support for publicly funded treatment and recovery support agencies**. The supports given to secure agencies financially have been lacking for decades, and we have seen a continued erosion of treatment and recovery support services due to the closures caused by COVID-19. It is essential to fund to prevent the loss of these vital programs across America, and NAADAC continues to advocate for the inclusion of this funding in spending packages and other legislation.
- **Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant (SABG)** increases to serve the people who are not served by health care, welfare, or other means. This grant needs continued funding and NAADAC continues to advocate for that funding allocation, year after year.
- **Confidentiality and 42 CFR Part 2**. NAADAC is strongly concerned with the known and unintended consequences of the loosening of SUD patient record confidentiality regulations, especially the impact on people's decisions to seek treatment. As the Administration works to finalize these changes, NAADAC will be closely following implementation to analyze its impact on our clients.
- **Telehealth counseling, therapy, and recovery support**. COVID-19 has required a shift towards telehealth services. NAADAC is working to keep telehealth an option with equal reimbursement of services that are provided in-person and via telehealth.

Please visit the advocacy section of NAADAC's website to learn more about the bills we are supporting, our ongoing discussions, the legislative language we are writing, and the initiatives we support. Watch our free 2020 Advocacy Webinar Series and sign up to participate in our free 2020 Virtual Hill Day on October 6 & 7. **Want to get even more involved?** Join NAADAC's Public Policy Committee, Clinical Issues Committee, Critical Issues in the Black Community Committee, Military and Veterans Advisory Committee, or other NAADAC Committees to help shape and guide NAADAC's advocacy priorities and influence change in and for the addiction profession.



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