

Did You Know:

Treating People in Black/African Ancestry Communities

A Resource For Black/African Ancestry Communities



First, Know the Landscape

► **More Likely To Be Incarcerated:**

According to the U.S. Dept of Justice, **people in Black/African Ancestry communities living with a serious mental illness are more likely to be incarcerated** than other races ([NIH - National Library of Medicine](#)).

► **Stats Speak Volumes: only 1 in 3 black adults** in the U.S. with mental health conditions receives treatment. People in Black/African Ancestry communities are **20% more likely to have serious psychological distress than Whites** ([National Institute on Minority Health Disorders](#)) And, the specialty mental health workforce is lacking in diversity with about **2% of psychiatrists and 4% of psychologists representing Black/African Ancestry communities** ([U.S. Government Accountability Office](#)).

► **Medical Mistrust:** According to a 2020 survey, **7 out of 10 people from Black/African Ancestry communities believe they are treated unfairly** by the healthcare system and most distrust it altogether ([Commonwealth Fund Report](#)).

► **Communication Is Key:** One study found that physicians working with people in Black/African Ancestry communities are **33% less likely to engage in patient-centered communications** than with people in White communities ([NIH – National Library of Medicine](#)).

► **Cultural Humility Matters:** Non-Black/African Ancestry clinicians should be trained to better understand the importance of listening and learning in treating people in Black/African ancestry communities, including by **engaging in implicit bias training, better understanding historical mistreatment of the community and the importance of proceeding with an understanding of cultural humility** ([Mass General Brigham McLean Hospital](#)).





5 Things to Know in Treating People in Black/African Ancestry Communities

► Acknowledge & Accept Privilege:

The first step in building trust with people you serve is to **understand that each individual is human and should be treated equitably and with compassion**. Also, remember you are caring for a person who may be at a low point in their life.

► Be Aware Of Implicit Bias:

At times we all can exude inherent and implicit bias based on race, language, appearance, perceived socio-economic status, sexual orientation and gender identification, among other factors. This is quite common, and not something to be ashamed of. Consider taking steps to change that in providing care in diverse communities. **You can do so by participating in implicit bias training to better serve the needs of everyone.**

► Make A Commitment To Inclusion:

We all have the power to influence change. People who seek treatment may be resistant to treatment for many reasons including lack of trust. Consider asking the following:

- Who is part of your wellness plan?
- Who do you trust?
- What would make you feel most comfortable with the care you are receiving?

Regardless of their response, these questions promise to make the path forward easier.

► Compassion & Empathy Go a Long Way:

When engaging with people in diverse and minoritized communities experiencing a medical crisis, **a good first step is thinking objectively of a time when you experienced unfair treatment**. This unfair treatment may have been due to your appearance, age, gender or other factors. Ask yourself, “in that moment, what did I need?” Then ask yourself, “how can I show that same compassion & empathy in how I treat this person?” That approach goes a long way toward building a stronger alliance.

► Step Out Of Your Comfort Zone:

Mental health is a partnership between passion and expertise. This may mean learning more about how to effectively treat people in diverse and minoritized communities differently. **The goal is wellness and helping the person in front of you feel most comfortable and empowered in their care journey.** You can make a positive and powerful difference in that person’s life.



To learn more about NAMI’s work on the Community Health Equity Alliance initiative, created to improve access to care for people experiencing serious mental health conditions in Black/African Ancestry communities, visit chea.nami.org.

