

Addressing Structural Racism Through Public Policy Advocacy: A Policy Statement from the American Heart Association

Executive Summary

In 2020, the American Heart Association, in recognition of the increasing health disparities in our country and the overwhelming evidence of the damaging effect of structural racism on cardiovascular and brain health, published a Presidential Advisory that recognized racism as a fundamental driver of health disparities. The advisory directed the American Heart Association to advance antiracist strategies regarding science, business operations, leadership, quality improvement, and advocacy.

This policy statement builds on the call to action put forth in our Presidential Advisory, discussing specific opportunities to leverage public policy advocacy in promoting overall wellbeing, and rectifying those longstanding structural barriers that impede the progress that we need and seek for the health of all communities. This statement examines the history of structural racism and offers policy considerations across several social drivers of health including health care, healthy food and nutrition access, access to capital, housing, education, and the environment. The Association also suggests a multipronged approach to addressing structural racism through public policy and articulates a set of principles to guide its advocacy and help to provide a roadmap for other organizations seeking to pursue a successful policy agenda focused on mitigating the various manifestations of structural racism. While the statement discusses difficult aspects of our past, ultimately, it is meant to provide a forward-looking blueprint that can be embraced by a broad spectrum of stakeholders who share the Association's commitment to eliminating structural racism and realizing true health equity.

Figure 1: Principles for Addressing Structural Racism through Public Policy

