



## **The Hispanic Neuropsychological Society**

April 4, 2020

The Honorable Michael R. Pence  
Vice President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
NW Washington, DC 20500

Robert R. Redfield, MD  
Director  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention  
1600 Clifton Road  
Atlanta, GA 30329

The Honorable Alex M. Azar II  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Anthony S. Fauci, MD  
Director  
National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases  
5601 Fishers Lane  
Bethesda, MD 20892

Dear Vice President Pence, Secretary Azar, and Directors Redfield and Fauci,

Given the challenges faced by the American people due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hispanic Neuropsychological Society would like to affirm support for, and additionally contribute to, the statement provided by the American Psychological Association and other mental health constituents.

First and foremost, it is imperative that information provided to the American people regarding COVID-19 consistently be based on scientific evidence that factors in all aspects of cultural background, including distinct customs, beliefs, histories, communication styles, and diverse racial and ethnic origins. This will ensure that accurate, understandable, and culturally-responsive information is disseminated for the public good that upholds American and humanistic values.



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Second, it is not only important to consider and address the mental health of the American people at large but also to directly address mental health disparities involving the most vulnerable populations within the United States who will undoubtedly require tailored support, including:

- Persons from lower socioeconomic groups
- Persons who identify with racial/ethnic minority groups
- Indigenous peoples
- Migrant and refugee populations
- Persons who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning/queer (LGBTQ+)
- Older adults
- Persons with disabilities
- Individuals experiencing homelessness
- Persons within the criminal justice system
- Persons residing in physically, mentally, and verbally abusive households
- Low-income workers and independent contractors

Research on minority stress models demonstrates that members of racial and ethnic minority groups, such as the Latino/a, Asian, Black or African, Native American, and Middle Eastern populations, experience chronically higher baseline levels of stress than members of majority groups.<sup>1</sup> This is often due to race-related transactions between individuals and their social environment and personifies the very meaning of health disparities. By increasing stress and negatively impacting available healthy mediators of stress, such as resources for support and coping mechanisms, overt and covert racism alongside prejudice and discrimination significantly impact emotional wellbeing, and furthermore, increase the likelihood of individuals experiencing poor mental health outcomes. The added uncertainties and stressors within the current climate of the COVID-19 pandemic put these vulnerable populations at further risk for suffering mental health disparities. Of particular concern are members of migrant populations who are currently held in detention centers, and are at increased risk for contracting the virus due to close quarters and limited resources for care.<sup>2</sup> We strongly urge the government to actively address the physical and mental health needs of this particularly vulnerable population to ensure their safety and wellbeing while undergoing immigration-related procedures, and to uphold American values regarding due process in a humane manner.

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<sup>1</sup>Harrell, S. P. (2000). A multidimensional conceptualization of racism-related stress: Implications for the well-being of people of color. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 70(1), 42–57. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0087722>

<sup>2</sup>Gostanian, A. & Fichtel, C. (2020). 'Like sitting ducks': amid coronavirus, families, attorneys sound alarm over ICE detainees. NBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/sitting-ducks-amid-coronavirus-families-attorneys-sound-alarm-over-ice-n1169656>



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Additionally, in order to protect and care for these at-risk populations, as a national organization and group of constituents, we firmly stand against the rise of racist rhetoric, stigma, and paranoia due to race-related fears about COVID-19. We support the right of our Asian-American brothers and sisters, including those who have traveled and those who have tested positive for COVID-19, to live in a safe and non-discriminatory environment within our American borders. Creating stigma around these groups only further perpetuates mental health disparities and poor outcomes in persons who identify with these groups, and further places their lives unnecessarily at-risk, as evidenced by recent physical assaults against Asian-identifying individuals.<sup>3</sup> Our responsibility as a nation is to maintain safety and uphold the Constitutional values we hold so dear, not to contribute to rhetoric that places people and entire communities in harmful situations. For this reason, it is of utmost importance to share accurate information with the public in order to maintain our values as Americans and to ensure the collective mental and physical health of our Nation.

It is abundantly clear that COVID-19 does not discriminate by race. The harm caused by COVID-19, however, will undoubtedly be greater than the physical toll alone if we, as a country, allow for unnecessary division, discrimination, and the release of information lacking empirical scientific foundations. Eradicating the virus will depend on our ability to come together, protect each other, and cultivate resilience as human beings. We, therefore, stand with our healthcare partners around the country and the world that are demanding that no one be forgotten, left behind, or mistreated, especially those from vulnerable, underserved populations. We ask you to proactively take a stand as our leaders to protect against emerging health disparities in the wake of COVID-19, and to ensure that we protect every individual's unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness especially in these uncertain times.

We sincerely thank you for your efforts and the long hours you are working to ensure our safety and well-being. We are prepared and willing to assist you in anything you may need.

Most Sincerely,

The Hispanic Neuropsychological Society

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<sup>3</sup>Inskeep, Steve. (NPR KQED, Morning Edition). (2020, Mar 27). Asian Americans are blamed by some for COVID-19 outbreak. [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from <https://www.npr.org/2020/03/27/822383360/asian-americans-are-blamed-by-some-for-covid-19-outbreak>