



ASAP, representing substance use disorders prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery programs across New York State, issued the following statement in response to the murder of George Floyd and the harm being caused by racism in communities across the USA:

The picture of a police officer kneeling on George Floyd's neck until he died has made an indelible imprint on the fabric of our society. It serves as a banner for protest and a pall for so many coffins of countless other victims of social and racial injustice. The racism, abuse of power, and structural inequities at the root of our society's ills must be addressed.

The deaths of so many men and women are caused by racial and social injustice in systems whose purpose is to help the community in some way, not harm it. This is seen in abuse by some police, prison and jail guards; inequity in the delivery of healthcare, the concentration of environmental/health hazards in poorer neighborhoods; and failure to ensure that people of color have equal access to nutrition and other life-enhancing sustenance. To what extent have the systems created to make our communities healthier and more "just" become a knee on the neck of Black and Brown people in those communities?

Substance use disorders prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery service providers, represented by ASAP, have witnessed systemic racism; most obviously in the criminalization of addiction, mass incarceration of Black and Brown people for drug offenses, a decades-long shift of resources to the prison system, and policy steeped in racist innuendo characterizing addiction as an "urban" problem. It was only when opioid deaths began to spike in white communities that many elected officials took notice, but, with little action to reverse funding inequities. We have seen racism in the:

- Replacement of prevention staff with metal detectors and police in schools
- Spike in fatal overdose rates for Black and Brown men re-entering the community from prison because the system fails to provide harm reduction services
- Failure to view addiction through a public health lens, resulting in incarceration instead of treatment
- Failure to provide adequate recovery supports in high need communities

Racial disparities permeate all "helping" systems that were created to make ALL communities safe and healthy.

ASAP is committed to working with other groups to eliminate racism and other oppressive forces and help create healthy, just communities. We will engage in conversation to identify, confront and remove racial inequity in behavioral health care and all systems of care. We will discuss strategies that can be implemented to eradicate racism and, then, implement those strategies; guided by a diverse leadership, working for social and racial justice. We thank all who have supported work for social justice and promise our collaboration to continue that work in behavioral health settings.

We have a responsibility to "Change the Things We Can" and we will work to create that change. With a dedication to all whose lives have been lost because of racial and social injustice, we will also work with others to change the things we cannot change alone.